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13 E3 **EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW** ◀◀

ATI CROSSFIRE ANNOUNCED ◀◀

DEVIL MAY CRY 3 REVIEW ◀◀

GAME ON! LOGITECH MX518 MOUSE REVIEWED ◀◀

TRACKMANIA SUNRISE REVIEW ◀◀

FREE: **GOD OF WAR** POSTER ◀◀

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PLAYSTATION 3 XBOX 360 REVOLUTION

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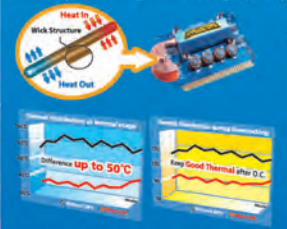


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ED'S NOTE

LATE NIGHT...

Impressive

THIS ISSUE OF NAG is a landmark edition for the following reasons: it's the most complicated issue in terms of extras that we've ever put together, there's a poster, a hardboard insert, another insert, the E3 supplement and three different covers. Anyone in publishing will be able to relate, but for the rest of you, just know that it's tricky. Secondly, this issue represents another increase in the number of NAG magazines on sale around the country. The reason I'm telling everyone this is to [a] blow our horn a little, [b] upset the competition and [c] impress our readers and advertisers [marketing people need to know this kind of thing]. There's just no scandal with honesty. So hooray to us then!

Errata and ergonomics

In the June issue we promised you a few things. We've over delivered in terms of the E3 supplement by making it 52 pages instead of 48 [whoopie] and we did three different covers instead of two – even though both these 'bonuses' are actually by accident, not design. I'm just highlighting them so you won't get upset and annoyed that we didn't have enough time to prepare the 'Make your own gaming magazine competition'. But rest assured, it will be in the next issue [August]. We're also giving H@rdcor3 a rest this issue. Our esteemed hardware reviewer was complaining about the workload – he is from Cape Town after all.

E3 – it's more important to be seen at E3 than to be at E3

Sitting on your side of the page, it will seem a little odd that anyone would complain about going to an event like E3. So let me get it over and done with so that I can talk about the good stuff. E3 has degenerated from an attendance point

of view. Don't get me wrong – the show is still the spectacular extravaganza you can only imagine, but the number of people attending has quadrupled. Suddenly everyone with a face is in gaming and the hottest ticket in Hollywood seems to be E3. I was under the impression that E3 was a trade event and not a bring-all-you-can-pot-and-pan-sale. All these annoying people, with exhibit only badges [greenies as they are called], were everywhere. Flooding the stands, queuing for food, getting in the way, pointing and staring and consuming everything that wasn't tied down – painful. But enough of that. The tag line at E3 was of a different pitch this year – where businesses gets fun – highlighting gaming [again] as the future of entertainment in more ways than one. There is a noticeable shift towards gearing mainstream [lifestyle] advertising at gamers, because the marketing gurus of the world are slowly beginning to realise that gamers have all the money and don't watch television anymore. Good news for gaming and bad news for everyone else. There are also a number of exciting new trends developing in gaming, and while many of them might not suit our market just yet, you can rely on NAG to bring you more cutting edge thinking this year than ever before.

Sincere stuff

I want to extend my thanks to the team here at NAG for putting together an excellent issue. Creating an extra 52-page supplement is no easy feat, not to mention the E3 video. I could go on, but then they'll start asking for increases and more benefits and that's going to hurt my new BMW payments.

See you tomorrow night...

Michael James [Editor]



COVER STORY

NO BIG STORY HERE except for the fact that NAG is shipping with three different covers this issue, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and Revolution [obvious really considering everything]. This is big news in the gaming world, so we decided to honour these new consoles with their own covers and article inside. The only minus was the fact that because Nintendo don't really have a real console to show anyone, they don't have any decent artwork – forcing us to break from design to cater for their inadequacies. It was also amusing to see our Art Director, Chris, trying to wrap his head around the multiple recursions across three different covers – hilarious.

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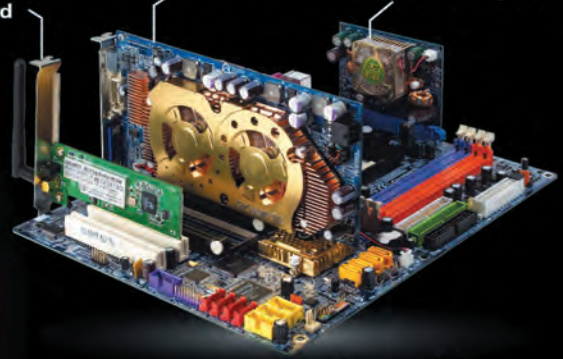
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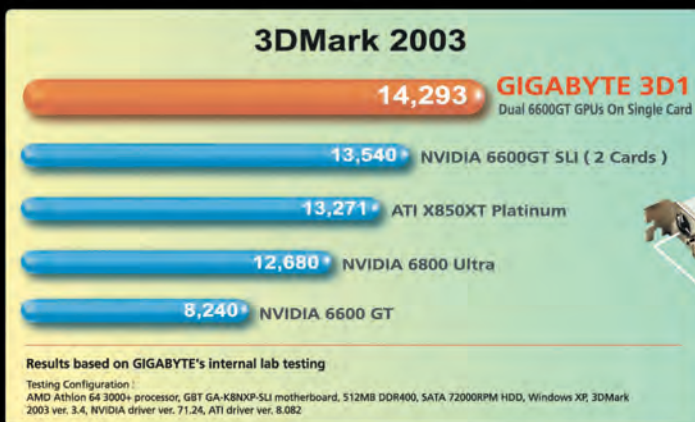
GA-K8NXP-SLI

NVIDIA nForce4 SLI Chipset

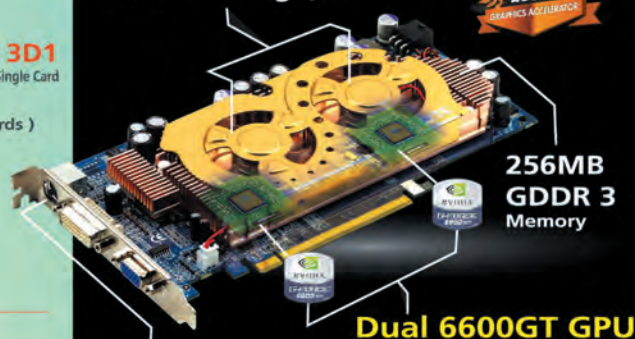
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BYTES

PSP'S UMD CRACKED

The primary media for Sony's PlayStation Portal, the Universal Media Disc (UMD), has been cracked by hacker

group Paradox. The group uploaded their findings, along with three PSP games, onto the net. A brief explanation in the team's released notes reveals that the UMD uses a

common ISO standard, which means that anyone with an ISO viewer on Windows can browse the media.

They also revealed that the files can successfully be written to CD or DVD. The three games leaked were the Japanese versions of Vampire Chronicle and Ridge Racer and the US version of Wipeout Pure.

The catch is, of course, that the PSP only uses UMD, for which there is no burner or burning standard available. This lessens fears that PSP games might make it into the pirate retail channel, but another suggestion might allow users to pirate games. With large format memory sticks coming out later this year, it is theoretically possible to load the games onto such a device and then play it on the PSP. Of course Sony won't be happy about that and updates to the PSP are likely to try and curb this.

LOCAL PSP RELEASE

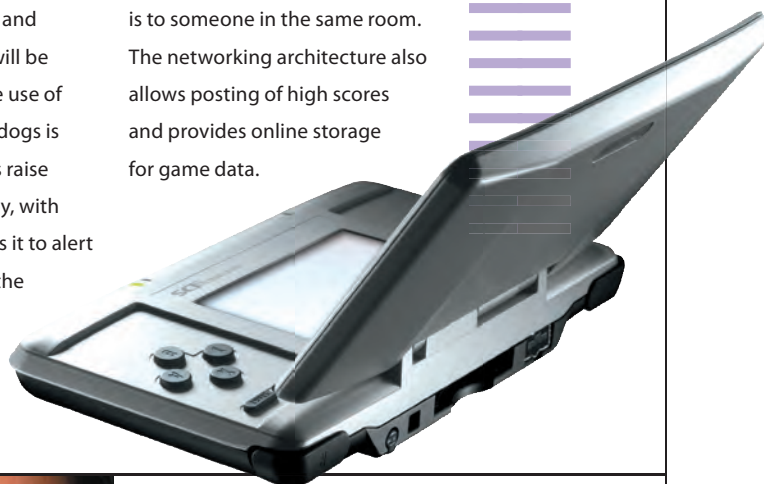
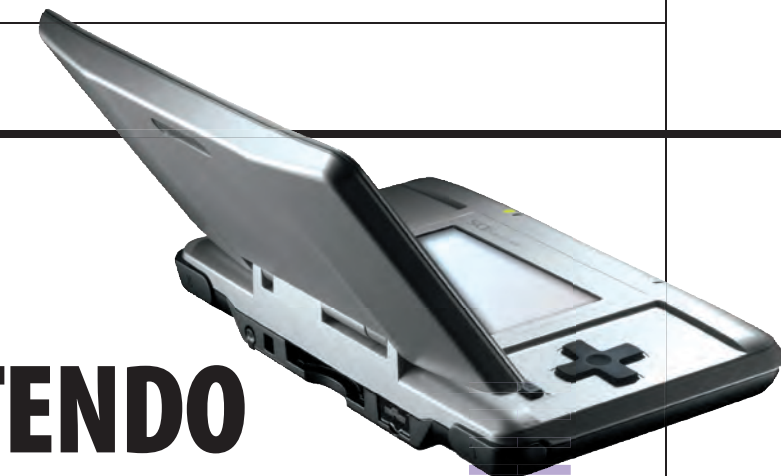
In the June issue we stated that the PSP may retail for R2 800.00 however Ster Kinekor Games have since confirmed that the PSP will be on sale in South Africa for between R2 200.00 – R2 300.00 for the Value pack, which consists of the PSP, a 32MB memory stick, battery pack, charger and headphones.

NINTENDO RIDES WI-FI CONNECTION

Wireless gaming in your hands

NINTENDO WILL BE SUPPORTING its multiplayer gaming system with game releases of many popular franchises. Mario Kart DS, Animal Crossing DS and a new Tony Hawk title will be among the first to make use of the technology. Nintendogs is a game that lets players raise and train a virtual puppy, with functionality that allows it to alert (by barking) its user to the proximity of another Nintendogs' owner, allowing them to interact. The Nintendo

Wi-Fi Connection has been designed in such a manner that it is practically as easy to connect to someone across the world as it is to someone in the same room. The networking architecture also allows posting of high scores and provides online storage for game data.



Hideo Kojima

KONAMI FOUNDS NEW DEVELOPMENT TEAM

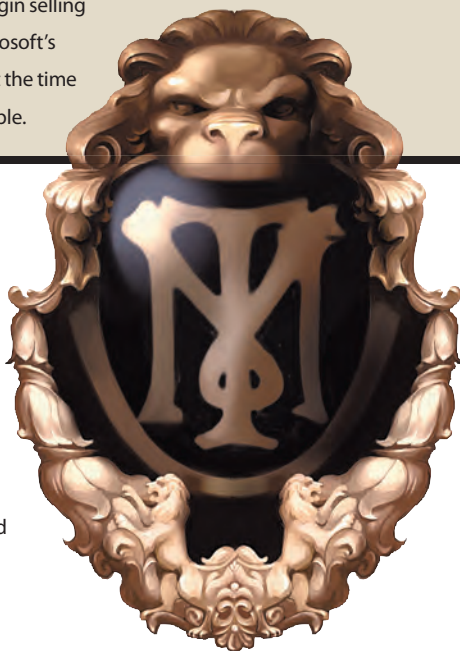
Konami has announced the formation of a new development studio called Kojima Productions, led by Hideo Kojima and employing the talents of producer Kenichiro Imaizumi, director Shuyo Murata and character designer Yoji Shinkawa. The studio has embarked on development of Metal Gear Solid 4 for the PlayStation 3, as well as Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence for PlayStation 2 and Metal Gear Ac!d 2 for the PSP.

LOGITECH TO SUPPORT XBOX 360

The peripherals manufacturer will begin selling officially licensed peripherals for Microsoft's upcoming next-gen console at about the time that the system itself becomes available.

SCARFACE DELAYED

Vivendi Universal's upcoming title Scarface, based on the 1983 film of the same name, has been delayed, and will now only launch on PC, Xbox and PlayStation 2 next year. The delay may well be due to the fact that a version is now also being developed for Xbox 360.



VETERAN JOINS STAR TREK ONLINE CREW

Perpetual Entertainment has appointed Daron Stinnett as Executive Producer for Star Trek Online. Stinnett's previous experience includes: Dark Forces, Outlaws, Star Wars Starfighter and Star Wars Republic Commando at LucasArts, Falcon 3.0 at Spectrum, Donkey Kong Jr and Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade before that. The massively multiplayer online title, Star Trek Online is expected to enter beta testing next year, and should be released early in 2007.

VALVE AND VIVENDI FALL OUT

Valve and Vivendi Universal recently announced that their publishing partnership will come to an end on the 31st of August. However, Valve has stated that this will not mean that the company will switch entirely to online distribution via Steam, and that talks with another publisher is in the works. The latter has not been named as yet, but evidence points strongly at Microsoft being involved (at least for Xbox versions of Valve software).

PlayStation®2

TOP TWENTY



1. GT4



2. Midnight Club 3



3. Area 51



4. Enthusia



5. MX VS ATV



6. SingStar Pop



7. Metal Gear Solid 3



8. Street Racing Syndicate



9. Madagascar



10. Lego Star Wars



11. Project Snowblind



12. Sponge Bob



13. Moto GP 4



14. Roland Garros 2005



15. Motor Cross Mania 3



16. Shadow of Rome



17. EyeToy Antigrav



18. Haunting Ground



19. Monster Hunter



20. TMNT 2

MOBILE INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS

A market research firm called Juniper Research recently released its forecasts for the mobile entertainment industry in the next few years. This year's global turnover is expected to reach \$17.6 billion, up 71% from last year, with a figure of around \$59 billion estimated for 2009. Gambling applications will account for 33% of this figure, gaming for 31%, music for 16% and sports for 8%. Ringtone distribution, which hitherto contributed 31% of the market, will drop to around 8% as other uses for the technology emerge.

XBOX 360'S WIRELESS CONTROLLERS

A company called RTX Telecom will provide the wireless controllers for Microsoft's upcoming Xbox 360. This will mark the first time that wireless controller ships standard with a gaming console. Up to four controllers will be able to link to a single console, and at least 16 will be able to co-exist in proximity without interference, for example if several Xbox 360s are linked in a local network.

CASTLEVANIA ON XBOX

New heroes and villains

KONAMI'S CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF Darkness, previously scheduled for release on PlayStation 2 later this year, will also be making an appearance on the Xbox at the same time. The information provided by the developers suggests that this game will be strong on story, with twists and turns in the plot, and surprise revelations along the way.

New Driver game on its way

Atari has announced that Reflections Interactive is at work on the next Driver game, set for release on PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox early next year. The game will make use of a photo-realistic representation of New York City, and will include online capabilities.



UNREAL ENGINE 3 – ON SALE SOON!

Epic has announced that its upcoming Unreal Engine 3 will be made available on Sony's Tools and Middleware program for PlayStation 3 once the license program launches. More information is available at www.unrealtechnology.com.



MUSIC VIDEOS ON THE PSP

Eagle Rock Entertainment has announced that it will soon begin publishing music videos on Universal Media Disc (UMD), for use on the PlayStation Portable. Artists that will soon appear on this format include: Black Label Society, Busta Rhymes, Jimi Hendrix, Iron Maiden, Marilyn Manson, Metallica, Nirvana, Pink Floyd, Puddle of Mudd and Snoop Dogg.

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WARHAMMER MMORPG IN THE WORKS

Mythic Entertainment, creator of Dark Age of Camelot and the upcoming Imperator, has secured the rights to develop a MMORPG title based on the Warhammer tabletop game and its rich background setting. Expect something in 2007.



THE NEXT FINAL FANTASY MOVIE

The computer-animated film Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children has been scheduled for release in Japan and America on 14 September. It will appear on DVD, and as yet there is no word on whether a UMD version will also be released, although this seems a fairly safe assumption.



TITAN QUEST

Iron Lore is at work on a role-playing game set in a streaming, seamless representation of the ancient world of Greece and Egypt, to be released for PC by THQ. The story deals with the escape from imprisonment of the Titans, the ancient 'gods before the gods'. Human heroes will be called upon to journey to various fabled locations from ancient myth in order to imprison the Titans again. The game will support single or group play through its story-driven campaign.



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HALO 2 SOUNDTRACK PERFORMS WELL

The Halo 2 soundtrack, since its release in November 2004, has managed to stay on the Billboard Top 50. Currently it can boast over 120,000 units sold – not great compared to big artist sales, but well above the average of 10,000 units soundtracks generally move.

INDIANA JONES REVIVAL

It seems that the adventuring archaeologist is set to return on both the big screen and in games. A fourth Indiana Jones film, written by George Lucas and to be directed by Steven Spielberg, has been provisionally scheduled for release next year. Meanwhile, LucasArts also stated that a game will be appearing on next-generation consoles in 2007.



Nintendo income flat

Mainly thanks to a strong Yen against a weak Dollar, Nintendo saw its profits rise, but the overall annual revenues are basically unchanged. And to dampen the mood even more, the company expects a 14% drop in profits. But there is light at the end of the tunnel. The DS is doing well and Nintendo predict that it will sell over 12 million units by the end of the next fiscal year, especially in the light of several large titles heading towards the platform. It's an ambitious claim, though, since it's more than double the 5.27 million units sold last year (falling short of Nintendo's predicted 6 million units).

Dirty Harry

The Collective has secured the rights to develop games based on the Dirty Harry property. The company will be working in conjunction with Clint Eastwood, who will provide his likeness and voice, as well as advising on creative issues. The first products, for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, are entering the development cycle.



PREY SLATED FOR ONLINE DISTRIBUTION

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THE FIRST PERSON SHOOTER Prey, from 3D Realms, will be distributed via Game xStream right from launch – even earlier if all goes according to plan. The system is similar to Steam, the online distribution system pioneered by Valve, with a couple of innovations thrown in. Firstly, 3D Realms intends to begin presales in advance of the actual launch date, allowing buyers to download the game and have it ready for unlocking at the moment of release. Additionally, the company also plans to facilitate a download strategy that will allow players to start playing the game minutes after commencing the download, by sending the game content in the background while the game is being played. Future titles from 3D Realms are expected to also make use of the Game xStream distribution method.

PSYCHOPATH

Titan Productions has launched an interesting project. The company has engaged the services of director John Carpenter to bring us both a game and a film. The story revolves around a former CIA agent who is recalled to duty to stop a serial killer. Unusual procedure, to say the least, so we can only hope the story justifies this premise.

PlayStation 2

F1 05

Formula 1

OUT 22 JULY 2005

WWW.PLAYSTATION.CO.ZA

STERKINEKOR

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WORLD OF WARCRAFT TO GROW

In the next couple of months, Blizzard will be adding two new battleground areas to World of Warcraft. Warsong Gulch will be a fairly small area wherein 10-vs.-10, Horde-vs.-Alliance battles can be staged in a capture the flag fashion. Alterac Valley will be a huge area for questing, and is intended for players of levels 51-60. Honour awards can be achieved in these zones, and Blizzard hopes to encourage players to complete quest objectives in order to earn these, rather than having high-level players ambushing weaker opponents in unfair fights. The company will be monitoring the new battlegrounds to see how players react to them, and what they enjoy and what they don't, about them.

BLIZZARD CRACKS DOWN ON BATTLE.NET ABUSERS

Blizzard recently deleted over 50,000 Warcraft III user accounts belonging to players who had violated Battle.net's policies on cheating. Over 8,000 CD keys were also suspended for a month, meaning that their owners cannot play at all for the duration of that particular copy of the game.

Another 3,331 CD keys have been banned permanently, the ultimate punishment; these players will have to purchase new copies of the game in order to play online again. Cheaters in World of Warcraft have been targeted too, though no figures have been released yet.



BATMAN GAMING ACCESSORIES

Mad Catz has entered into a licensing agreement with Warner Bros Consumer Products to develop video game accessories, for consoles and handhelds, based on the DC Comics Batman property. Specifically, many of the products will be inspired by the film Batman Begins.



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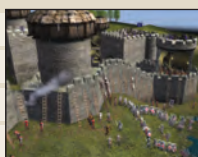
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WEB SCORES

Stronghold 2 [PC]

NAG [100]	75
GAMESPY.COM [5]	2.5
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	5.9
IGN.COM [10]	6.7



Empire Earth II [PC]

NAG [100]	62
GAMESPY.COM [5]	NR
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8
IGN.COM [10]	8.9



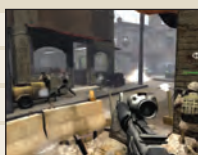
Trackmania Sunrise [PC]

NAG [100]	90
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.2
IGN.COM [10]	NR



Close Combat: First to Fight [PC]

NAG [100]	60
GAMESPY.COM [5]	3
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	7.3
IGN.COM [10]	NR



Devil May Cry 3 [PS2]

NAG [100]	90
GAMESPY.COM [5]	NR
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.6
IGN.COM [10]	9.6



Area 51 [PS2]

NAG [100]	70
GAMESPY.COM [5]	NR
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	7.2
IGN.COM [10]	8.5



Rugby 2005 [PS2]

NAG [100]	75
GAMESPY.COM [5]	NR
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	7.1
IGN.COM [10]	8



Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith [PS2]

NAG [100]	66
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	6.3
IGN.COM [10]	4.5

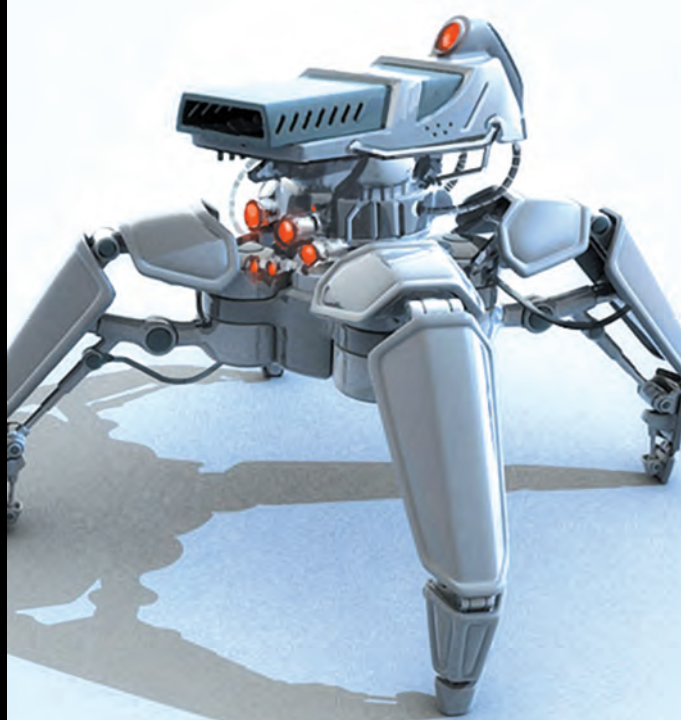


The ratings in this section, apart from the NAG ratings, are not the opinion of NAG Magazine. Duh.

Advertising to invade games

The concept of in-game advertising has been rattling around for some time and, in fact, has been implemented quite often already, with virtual billboards appearing in in-game landscapes, and the like. However, advertisers are now thinking of targeting game spectators, for example during gaming competitions and tournaments.

Technology has begun to emerge that allows a player's performance to be broadcast, over the Internet, for instance. Advertisers are now contemplating the possibility of inserting marketing content into such data streams. Although most of us have an aversion to advertising, it must be conceded that it has its economic value – production costs are subsidised by advertisers, for example in television and print media, allowing the end user to enjoy it at a much lower cost. The same could become true for game developers – interested parties would pay for the privilege of marketing their products within games, thus contributing to the development budget.



ALPHA PRIME

A LPHA PRIME IS YET another first person shooter, but this one appears to emphasise a sci-fi story, written by Ondrej Neff. The scene is set on an illegal asteroid mining base, with the player not only having to fight the robots there, but the base itself. Players will occasionally be required to hack various elements, sometimes granting themselves control of robots. The game's engine will feature a fully interactive environment. It is being developed for PC by Black Element Software.

GAMING TRULY BECOMING A SPORT

This statement is old hat to those plugged into the cyber-gaming scene. But even these people will be interested to discover that our pastime is now truly entering the sporting arena by dint of becoming more regulated, and requiring stringent verification. As an example, a recent attempt was made to play the arcade game Star Wars for the longest time in a one-man marathon, with the hopes of beating a record set in 1984. Brandon Erickson, the prospective record breaker, had to undergo blood tests before and after his attempt, and had to provide complete video footage with every frame date/time-stamped. The first was to verify that no performance or concentration enhancing drugs were used, while the latter was to prove that no electronic or other tampering occurred. A publication is now available that chronicles such events and records, Twin Galaxies' Official Video Game & Pinball Book of World Records. (www.twingalaxies.com)






90 MILLION PLAYSTATION 2S

Sony has announced that on 2 June 2005 the total number of PS2s manufactured exceeded 90 million units. This doesn't mean that all of these units have been sold and installed, but that figure must be quite close. At this rate, the company will have sold over 100 million units by the time the PS3 is released. Furthermore, given that the original PlayStation sold just over 100 million units in total, PS2 sales have bettered that by over two years!



STARGATE SG-1: THE ALLIANCE

Under development at Perception, and to be published by JoWooD Productions, this game will feature the voice talents of Richard Dean Anderson, Amanda Tapping, Michael Shanks and Christopher Judge, the cast members of the TV series that is now entering its 9th season.

PlayStation®2 



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ON THE HORIZON

US RELEASE DATES



PC RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
July	The Bard's Tale	RPG
July	Asheron's Call: Throne of Destiny	MMORPG
July	Battle of Britain II: Wings of Victory	Flight
July	BloodRayne 2	Action
July	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Puzzle
July	FlatOut	Racing
July	RHEM 2	Puzzle
July	Starship Troopers	Shooter
August	187 Ride or Die	RPG
August	Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	Adventure
August	Dungeon Siege II	RPG
August	Madden NFL 06	Sport



XBOX RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
July	Battlestations: Midway	Action
July	Big Mutha Truckers 2	Racing
July	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Puzzle
July	City of the Dead	Shooter
July	Evil Dead Regeneration	Action
July	FlatOut	Racing
July	Halo 2 Multiplayer Map Pack	Shooter
July	NCAA Football 06	Sports
July	Sid Meier's Pirates!	Strategy
August	Madden NFL 06	Sport
August	Metal Slug 4 & 5	Fighting
August	Namco Museum: 50th Anniversary	Action
August	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Action



PS2 RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
July	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Puzzle
July	Colosseum: Road to Freedom	Action
July	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	Shooter
July	Flipnic	Action
July	FullMetal Alchemist 2: Curse of the Crimson Elixir	Action
July	Killer 7	Action
July	NCAA Football 06	Sports
July	Psychonauts	Adventure
August	DICE	Action
August	Inuyasha: Feudal Combat	Fighting
August	Madden NFL 06	Sport
August	Namco Museum: 50th Anniversary	Action
August	Neopets: The Darkest Faerie	Adventure
August	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Action
August	Zatchbell	Fighting



PSP RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
July	Batman Begins	Action
July	Death Jr.	Action
July	Doraslot Kyojin no Hoshi II	Casino
July	Tenchu: Shinobi Taizen	Action



GBA RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
July	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Puzzle
July	Fullmetal Alchemist: Dual Sympathy	Action
July	Gundam Puyo Puyo	Puzzle
July	Harvest Moon: More Friends of Mineral Town	RPG
July	Lunar Genesis	RPG
July	Nanostray	Shooter
July	Oggy and the Cockroaches	Platform
July	Sigma Star Saga	Shooter
July	Snood 2: On Vacation	Puzzle



GAMECUBE RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
July	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Puzzle
July	Harvest Moon: Another Wonderful Life	RPG
July	Killer 7	Action
August	Hello Kitty Roller Rescue	Action
August	Madden NFL 06	Sport
August	Namco Museum: 50th Anniversary	Action
August	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Action
August	Zatchbell	Fighting



Look & Listen
DVD • CD • GAMES — MP3 • ACCESSORIES

CHARTS

PC Games

#	Title
1	Sims 2 University Expansion
2	Star Wars KOTOR 2
3	Stronghold 2
4	CSI Dark Motives Exclusive
5	Playboy The Mansion
6	Lego Star Wars
7	Sims 2
8	SWAT 4
9	Harry Potter & Prisoner of Azkaban Classics
10	Star Wars KOTOR 1 Classics
11	Cricket 2004 Classics
12	Empire Earth 2
13	Need For Speed Underground 2
14	Need For Speed Underground Classics
15	Act Of War Direct Action
16	Lord Of The Rings Return Of The King Classics
17	Lord Of The Rings Battle For Middle Earth
18	CSI Exclusive
19	Rugby 2005
20	Star Wars Battlefront

PlayStation 2

#	Title
1	Gran Turismo 4
2	Midnight Club 3 DUB
3	Rugby 2005
4	Star Wars Episode 3 Revenge of Sith
5	Need For Speed Underground 2
6	Grand Theft Auto San Andreas
7	Metal Gear Solid 3 Snake Eater
8	Getaway 2 Black Monday
9	Eye Toy Play 2 & USB Camera
10	Burnout 3 Takedown
11	Dancing Stage Fever (Dance Mat Game)
12	Killzone
13	Fifa 2005
14	Grand Theft Auto Vice City Platinum
15	Splinter Cell Chaos Theory
16	Playboy The Mansion
17	Tekken 4 Platinum
18	Fifa Street
19	Leisure Suit Larry
20	WRC (World Rally Champ.) 4

JULY AT A GLANCE



6-10
Gaming
**Electronic Sports
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www.esworldcup.com

8
Movie
War of the Worlds

15
Movie
Fantastic Four



NOKIA DOESN'T GIVE UP


Despite the N-Gage's mediocre performance in the market, Nokia is not giving up on the concept of mobile gaming. Support for the N-Gage will continue, but other avenues will also be pursued. The next generation of gaming-enabled Nokia smartphones will be able to receive games not just in the MMC format, as at present, but also by means of over-the-air download or via the Internet, allowing users to download a game to their computer and then transfer it via USB cable or Bluetooth to their phones. The company hopes that the adjustment of its strategy will boost performance of its mobile gaming phones.

GRAND THEFT AUTO ON PSP

Rockstar's Grand Theft Auto franchise will be making its debut on PSP right after the European launch of the handheld in September. It will be titled Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories.

SOME NEW GAMING STATISTICS

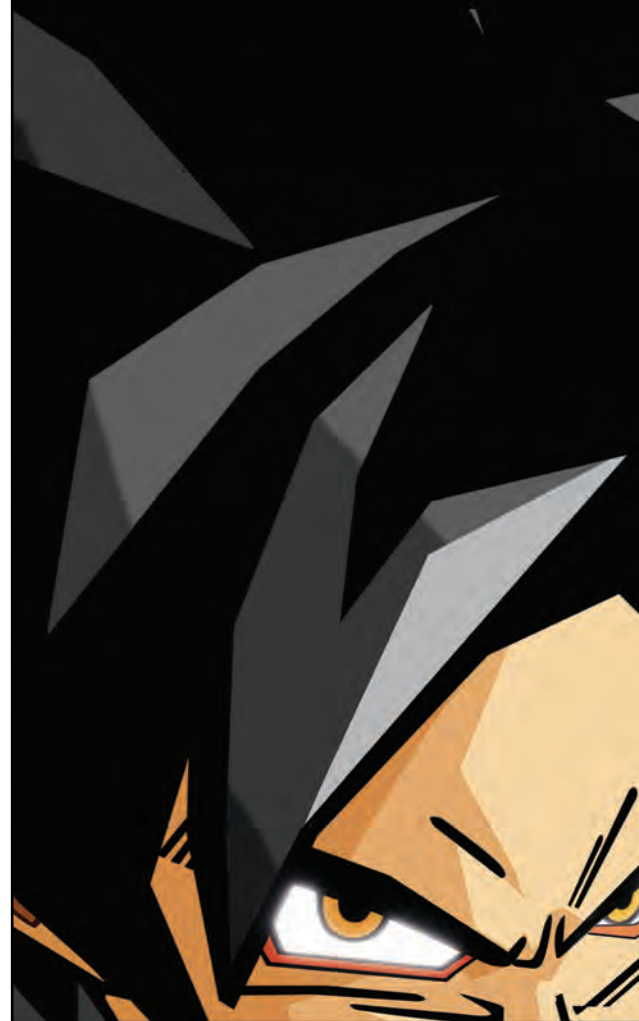
AOL Games recently commissioned an independently executed survey to determine gaming-related statistics in the United States. Although specific figures locally will no doubt differ, these numbers are nevertheless fairly indicative of trends in the industry. "Gaming" as defined in this survey includes computer, video, online and cellphone/PDA games. Thirty-nine percent of adult respondents, aged 18-55, reported having played games; with the figure rising to 46% for the total surveyed group, aged 12-55. Of game-playing adults, 10% admit to having at some point being addicted, and 27% report having stayed up all night to play on at least one occasion. Eighteen percent of respondents bought a game because it featured a film character. Interestingly enough, 47% of Americans polled, believe that there is too much violence and sexual content in games. 79% of the gamers polled indicated that they had played games with their family, which means that gaming is now one of the top family-oriented pastimes. If marooned on a desert island, those who would prefer to have their gaming devices with them outnumbered those who would prefer media-oriented electronic devices such as music players or TVs. A third of respondents confirmed skipping a favourite TV show in favour of a game, and 19% admitted to skipping a meal. Many of the people surveyed reported playing mobile games on school or work breaks. Online games are also on the rise, with card games being the current leader with a market share of 66%. The survey was conducted by interviewing around 800 American adults (aged 18-55) and some 200 teenagers (12-18).

PlayStation®2 

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WWE

MULTIPLAYER

DRAMA IN BARCELONA — ORDER IN RIO

THE SECOND OFFICIAL STOP of the World Tour took place in Barcelona, Spain, during the last weekend of April. Due to space constraints regarding the ESWC qualifier report, NAG brings you all the action this month, alongside that of the third stop: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In addition to the all-star Painkiller tournaments, the CPL has now introduced Counter-Strike as a permanent feature in the World Tour. Each stop will offer a prize purse of \$20,000, which, while not quite as impressive as the \$50,000 purse for Painkiller, is no laughable sum of money.

Attending the Spain stop were all the familiar names, including Vo0 (Netherlands), Fatal1ty (USA), Zyz (Germany), Stelam (Germany) and Stermy (Italy), as well as famous Counter-Strike teams Mousesports (Germany), Ninjas in Pyjamas (Sweden), Complexity (USA), and SK Gaming (Denmark).

Many long-standing questions were answered at this tournament. Would Vo0 ever be defeated? Would the CPL switch to CS: Source or stay faithful to 1.6? Would Ninjas in Pyjamas, the legendary team of old, succeed under their reformed banner? Indeed, the event turned out to be full of surprises. In Painkiller, it seemed Fatal1ty's run of poor form was only getting worse, as he lost first to Vo0, then Zyz, then Ztrider, finishing a disappointing sixth. The newcomer Ztrider (Sweden) performed superbly on debut, taking fifth place with the victory over Fatal1ty, and for his efforts was rewarded with a contract from Vo0's team, Fnatic, allowing him to attend further World Tour stops. Otherwise, the winner's bracket seemed to be proceeding as normal. That is, until the meeting of SK Gaming team-mates Zyz and Stelam. In a shocking turn of events, Zyz, seeded second for the

tournament, was shockingly beaten by the seventh-seeded Stelam, and comprehensively too. Stelam continued to dominate after that game, beating all his subsequent opponents including the seemingly unstoppable Vo0. The victory came virtually from nowhere, his last gaming success being Eurocup 2001 with Quake 3 team Unmatched. Vo0 took second place, Stermy third and Zyz fourth.

It seems, at least for the moment, that the CPL have gone back on their initial decision, and continued to support Counter-Strike 1.6. The tournament was won by Mousesports, who dispatched of runners-up Complexity in two convincing maps. NiP never looked anything like as strong as the names of their players might suggest, and came in a shaky third, while SK Gaming finished a rather unimpressive ninth. Good Game of France took fourth.

Four weeks later, the following stop graced the picturesque shores of Rio de Janeiro. Brazil has always been an active and formidable Counter-Strike playing nation, even though it is, like South Africa, relatively isolated from the European, American and Asian communities. This was their turn to shine, and shine they did. Four Brazilian teams finished in the top six, leaving space for only SSV-Lehnitz and Fastlane, both from Sweden. The prodigious team Made in Brazil, who became the talk of the town by acquiring star Norwegian player Ola "Element" Moum, only to fire him two weeks later, proved they didn't need the outside help, winning the final against SSV-Lehnitz in straight maps. The



**Vo0 in action at
the CPL World
Tour**

DEATHSBANE'S FZERO QUALIFIES FOR ACON5

AS SOME READERS MIGHT recall, Shaun Marx, better known as Deathsbane, left South Africa to further his studies in Australia, where he joined top Aussie team Function Zero.

The team has continued to dominate the scene down under, most recently securing their tickets to China for the finals of ACON5, a world-class tournament featuring teams from America, the East, and the

Scandinavian countries, among others.

They are also likely to qualify for the ESWC finals in France, having already won their regional qualifier. It's always impressive to see a local player achieving overseas, and NAG wishes Shaun and his team the best of luck in China. Hopefully we'll see him back on home soil at some point in the future. [www.acon5.com]

relatively unknown GameCrashers came in third, with veterans G3nerationX fourth, Revoltz fifth and Fastlane sixth. SK Gaming (Denmark), once again, did not feature.

Meanwhile, the player line-up for Painkiller was much the same as in Spain, and kicked off with all the top seeds looking strong. Stermy knocked Fatal1ty to the loser's bracket in a crazy three-mapper which saw each game end with a difference of only one frag. Vo0 then dispatched of Stermy, and Zyz once more met Stelam. In a complete reversal of the events of the previous stop, Zyz took an early lead in both games and more than doubled his opponent's score. However, he wasn't able to follow Stelam's example against Vo0, and lost heavily in the winner's bracket final. But what had happened to Fatal1ty in the loser's bracket? Looking rejuvenated and re-motivated, the American ripped through Booms (Italy), Stelam, Ztrider, and then Zyz, coming head to head with Vo0 in the grand final. Needing to win twice, Fatal1ty almost pulled it off, taking the first match 2-1, but losing the second 2-0. Thus, Vo0 claimed his second World Tour win and his sixth international title, and Fatal1ty returns once more as the primary challenger to the throne. Zyz finished a respectable third, and Ztrider seems to be growing from strength to strength, here taking fourth. Stermy and Stelam rounded things off with fifth and sixth respectively. [www.cplworldtour.com]

CURRENT WORLD TOUR STANDINGS

1. Sander "fnatic.Vo0" Kaasjager
2. Benjamin "SK|zyz" Bohrmann
3. Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendell
4. Stephan "SK|SteLam" Lammert
5. Allesandro "Play.it.Stermy" Avalone
6. Alexander "fnatic.Ztrider" Ingarav
7. Andrew "fnatic.Gellehsak" Ryder
8. Alexey "x6.Lexer" Nesterov



EVOLVE, ETHEREAL SWITCH TO SOURCE

UNLIKE IN THE INTERNATIONAL community where sponsorship is a key issue, clan mergers in South Africa are fairly rare. The most notable example, which most readers should remember, was the joining of Evolve and DC*Ignite in January 2004. However, until now, it has been the only notable example. For roughly the same reasons as the Ignite merge (which eventually resulted in the current iIdentity Gaming as a spin-off team), Evolve and Durban-based Ethereal have joined forces. Evolve are South Africa's leading team who will be representing our country at the Electronic Sports World Cup in Paris in July. Ethereal's achievements are not far behind, with fifth and third places under their belt at major local tournaments.

This decision comes in light of both teams' intention to switch to Counter-Strike: Source as soon as Evolve return from France. With Valve's announcement that they will be stopping support for Counter-Strike and focussing instead on Source, it seems inevitable that the global community will switch sooner or later. South Africa

looks to join in on this trend at rAge 2005, where Source has a good chance of being featured.

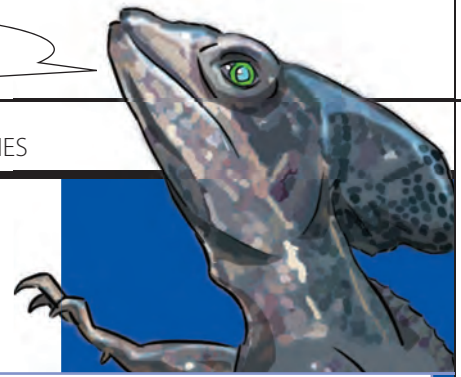
We spoke to Bryce "Gravity" Hills, from the old Ethereal. "We merged mainly for practice reasons," he said, "... hopefully to pull a Durban team through to hit the top." His team consists of Dr4k, Bouncer125, Metro and Guard, which is unchanged from their squad at the ESWC 2005 qualifiers. "Right now we are working with Evolve to better their performance at the ESWC finals in July," he said. "From then on we are all Source. Of course, there's a lot of work yet to be done on the game, with regards to hit boxes and some models' head difference, but it's like when CS was 1.3. The community is growing online. It's really rocketing." While the merge will no doubt come as a controversial move, Bryce was confident that it was the right choice. "A plan took place," he said, "with votes from all the players, and we decided we're going to go the whole way. We've got to play the cards we're given." **NAG**



Leerooooooy Jeeeeeeenkins!

DOMAIN OF THE_BASILISK

BY ANTON LINES



“Reality” Gaming

AS WITH SO MANY things in this world, the South Koreans were onto something. And this time I’m not talking about their mass-production sweatshops, their widespread broadband connections, or their collective love for Vin Diesel. No, this is about their obsession with Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games.

Between Lineage and Lineage II, South Korean company NCSoft has over four million subscribers. Their country’s population is roughly 45 million, and when we include subscription numbers from other MMORPGs, it works out that about 10% of their population have a virtual character of some sort.

The same phenomenon is starting to catch on in the West. But while games like Ultima Online and Dark Age of Camelot have been able to survive in the Western market, the first non-Korean title to come anywhere close to Lineage was – surprise, surprise – World of WarCraft. Nevertheless, due to recent successes of the genre, a host of new MMORPGs are currently headed our way. At E3 there were twenty-five on show. But with so many new arrivals, the market is likely to become saturated quickly, and not all of them are going to make any real impact. In fact, I’d like to argue that, comparatively speaking, none of them will make any impact at all.

To see why, we must examine what makes a MMORPG enjoyable. Despite various apocalyptic prophecies doing the rounds, I don’t see World of WarCraft vanishing anytime soon. And Lineage II is growing so fast that NCSoft’s offices have to be protected by security that dwarfs the systems of most international banks. What makes these two examples so appealing? It’s impossible to say that they are, objectively speaking, better games than their competitors – in fact, both have been criticised for being too repetitive. Yet their communities continue to grow.

There are definite reasons for their individual popularity, and none have anything to do with game content. Lineage was the first of its kind in South Korea and

in many ways expressed an unspoken sentiment in the national population. The ability to lead a ‘double-life’, as it were, was appealing to a culture in which public and private lives were already sharply divided. The game gave players the ability to express themselves – something they had not previously been able to do. It follows, then, that it need not have been Lineage. Anything massively multiplayer, with a solid enough programming foundation, would have done the job.

In the case of World of WarCraft, the reasons are a little different. We can attribute its success to a rather simple fact: it’s WarCraft. Blizzard certainly are masters at marketing. They created a MMORPG just when the West was begging for one, based on an already popular franchise. As long as the game didn’t outright suck, we all knew that everyone would be playing it. And that’s just the point: we play because everyone else is. It isn’t the nature of the game that makes a MMORPG fun; it’s the nature of the players.

Unless the game shows serious technical flaws, its play dynamic will not influence popularity as much as the number of subscribers it pulls. All role-playing games depend on player input, and computer game versions are no different. We have our dominant titles, which gained their initial support for various reasons, and that’s virtually all we need. Splitting the player base will make the experience less enjoyable overall, and most players recognise this (even if they do so subconsciously). It’s therefore unlikely that any new title will be able to challenge the likes of WoW or Lineage for a long time to come.

[www.leeroyjenkins.net] **NAG**

“Blizzard certainly are masters at marketing. They created a MMORPG just when the West was begging for one, based on an already popular franchise. As long as the game didn’t outright suck, we all knew that everyone would be playing it.”



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GAME BOY ADVANCE



Violence
Language

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(s05)



PSP (PlayStation Phoney)

COME CLOSER, I HAVE something to discuss. Are we alone? Good. Now, listen. Tell you what: I'll make you a special deal. You'll like this, I promise. Here's the skinny: you spare me your platitudes, and I'll cut down on the big overbearing words. Sounds good? Thought so - it's a compelling offer.

Considering the banal remarks this column might get, it's a deal that will suit me just fine.

The PSP, as we all know, is Sony's little foray into the utterly Nintendo dominated hand-held market. With its seductively wide screen, cacophony of features and unerring ability to attract dirt and grime magnetically from over 100 meters, it certainly looks to be a sweet deal on paper. The Sony zealots have all but hailed the PSP as the saviour of handheld gaming, despite the fact that it won't fit in your pocket.

Now while there is technically nothing wrong with the PSP (aside from various manufacturing faults, design flaws and mechanical failures), Sony has somehow seen fit to take every wrong turn on the highway to permeating the hand-held market. They certainly had the right vision for the PSP, creating a sleek black peripheral that can play high-quality games, movies and music. It even has built-in wireless for open-air multiplayer. How could such an appealing gadget go wrong? This isn't even a rhetorical question.

Sony seems to have a knack for this. Delaying the European (and thus South African) release of the PSP because they "needed more stock for their US release" is fine and dandy, but when the PSP doesn't sell the expected units and there is actually a surplus, Sony somehow manages to tell the world "We've sold out! We need to outsource our production to more companies so we can meet the demand." Planet Sony is an interesting place to live where fiction becomes reality!

But I'll give Sony this little *faux pas*. Everyone makes mistakes - even soulless bottom-line feeding corporations whose piquancy has

carried them far since conception.

What does get my proverbial goat, however (and I realise that this is entirely an opinion on the matter), is Sony's blatant control they wish to exert over my possessions. Having bought a PSP, it is now my property. Having been entirely inept at releasing a Web browser for the PSP (there is one due out soon, that will be sold at an estimated R300), the alternative for me has been the Wipeout Pure built-in browser, giving me access to the Internet as well as various home-brewed software. It's rather poetic, really, to purchase a game I wasn't interested in, in the first place, only to get something I'd have to pay the same amount for later anyway. I was excited when an update for the PSP was announced, wondering what this rather large 14MB download would feature. Lo and behold, the only thing contained within that waste of a 32MB Memory Stick Duo space, was a security update to prevent home-brew software from running on the PSP.

Well done, Sony. You've sold me a car, but are forcing me to only use a certain brand of petrol/windshield wiper/seat warmer.

So, we have a lustreless release of limited games, complete lack of movies and music, a pathetically small bundled memory stick (with larger ones being horribly overpriced), no Web browser and overbearing security measures to restrict what I do with my own possession.

That's a wonderful way to begin the life of a product, Sony: by utterly ignoring every lesson to be learned from the last ten years of video-gaming product releases and focusing only on what could appeal to the MTV generation. **NAG**

“Well done, Sony. You've sold me a car, but are forcing me to only use a certain brand of petrol/windshield wiper/seat warmer.”



5 REASONS TO GET THE NEXT ISSUE OF SA COMPUTER MAGAZINE



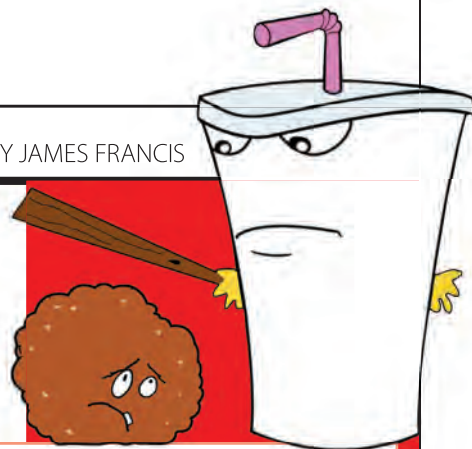
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ON SALE 6 JULY 2005

The PC – D.O.A. in the Future Gen



PC GAMING IS DEAD. To me at least. Yes, the stoics, the PC die-hards and the zealots might still hang on by the skin of the beige box's teeth, but it finally dawned on me that as a gaming device, the PC is a redundant, impersonal, over-rated and an expensive waste of time.

For the sake of the argument, let's take a look at the PC's qualities and why it has lost the plot. Graphics would be a good place to start. To maintain a cutting-edge in this field, you need to shell out for a card that requires a replacement every two years (optimistically). At the same price you can buy a console that lasts at least four. And your card is never pushed to its full potential – by the time it would be, we're already two or more generations into new cards. Besides, consoles now kick ass in that department. Go take a look at the Killzone PS3 tech video, which isn't pre-rendered. Go look at Dead Rising, Full Auto or the myriad of initial titles planned for the future generation. Even if you get your PC to deliver these same visuals, it will cost you a fortune. Besides, both Doom 3 and Half-Life 2 run perfectly on the Xbox – a technically inferior platform to the PCs required to run the same games.

More important, though, is the PC's lack of social grace. As a bona fide old-school PC gamer (my first machine was a CGA XT that booted from floppies) I've never seen a PC get a group of people, especially non-gamers, into the game like a console does. Girlfriends, friends and the Pizza guy... whoever is in the room wants to play, and gets to play. The control schemes are often intuitive and consoles have far more pick-up-and-play titles. Hey, you might like to suffer for your games, but I prefer them to be fun.

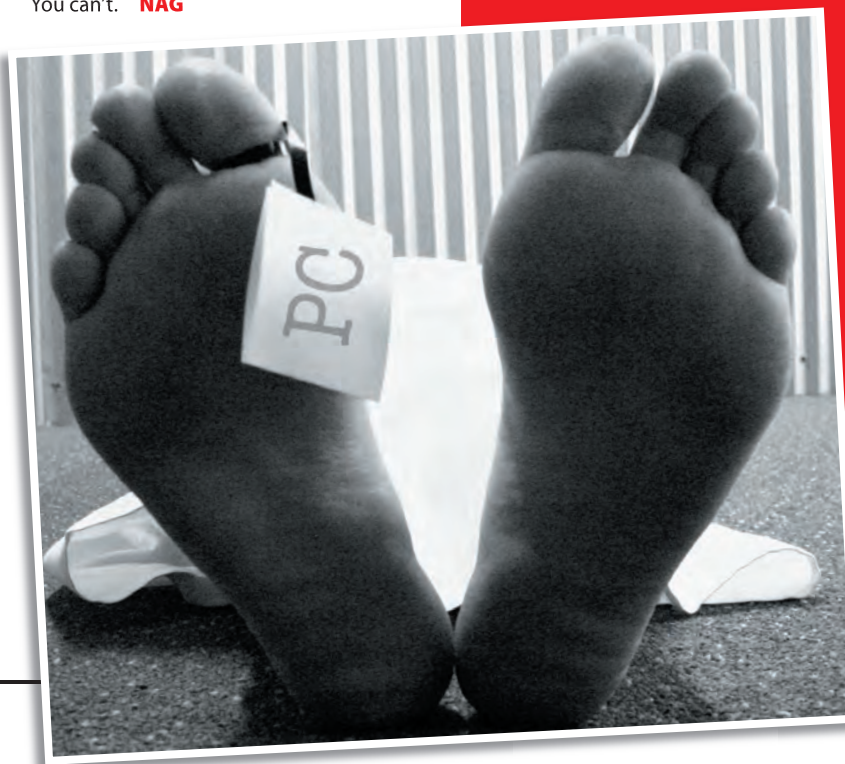
You can drop your console in a bag, head over to a friend with a TV and the playing continues. By comparison, the PC isolates you and your only hope for good multiplayer

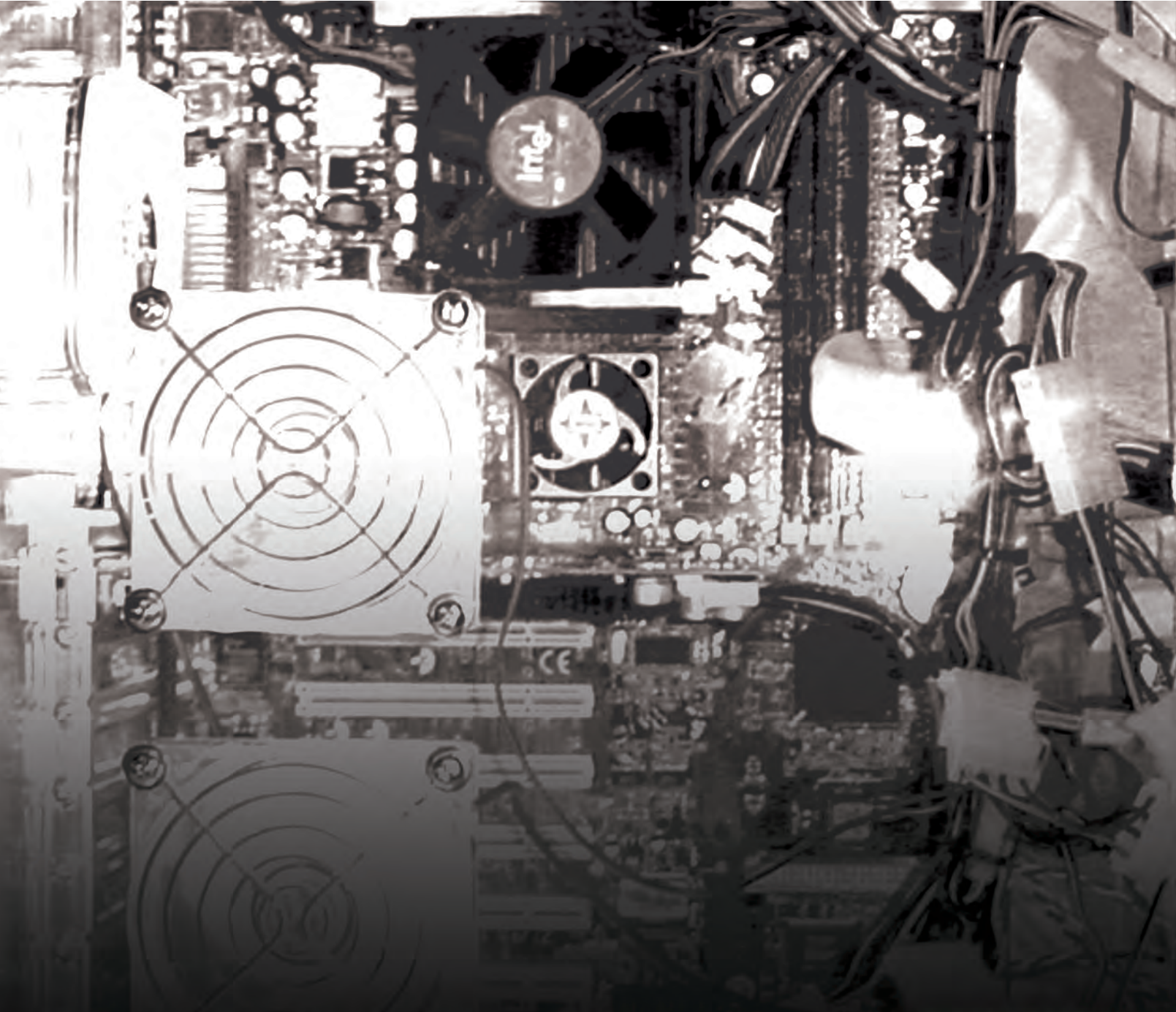
is via a LAN or online. All the new consoles support at least four controllers and they all have broadband. If the new Live is anything to go by, sending e-mail, chat messages or even distributing your own levels and skins will be a matter of a few clicks on your controller.

Perhaps all that PCs have left are a few niche genres. But console FPS games outshine their PC peers – consoles have more genres, more variety and, sadly, more gameplay innovation. Gaming on PCs has always been and always will be a novelty. The PC reminds me of the bitter old man on the porch screaming about how it used to be better in his day, while you have to keep paying his expensive bills and clean up after him all the time. Consoles are now more powerful, flexible, and sociable and above all, they are built specifically to play games. How can you beat that?

You can't. **NAG**

“The PC reminds me of the bitter old man on the porch screaming about how it used to be better in his day, while you have to keep paying his expensive bills and clean up after him all the time.”





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INBOX

LETTER OF THE MOMENT

[This Is From Our Forum [www.nag.co.za] A While Ago, Ed]

FROM Gray-Fox

SUBJECT The NAG editor is an AH

Yes, you read that right – the NAG Editor is an a**hole. Saying that might get me banned, and that would be fine, since it would probably go even further to prove my point, but either way, I simply have to say this: the replies to some of the people's letters this month [June issue, Ed] were nothing short of disgusting. What gives him the right to judge people by what games they play or where they live? That one guy complained about people giving him trouble because of his age while playing Counter-Strike and he got this reply, "The problem isn't really your age - it's the fact that you're playing CS." Gee, thanks for that. What a totally useless reply. This poor guy writes a long letter and the Editor of South Africa's self-proclaimed "premiere gaming magazine" doesn't care enough about gamers to even give a decent answer when they write him. Instead he makes a lame joke we've all heard a million times before. Thanks for wasting not only the guy who wrote the letter's time, but everyone else's as well. And if that wasn't bad enough, he totally mocks people that live in Nelspruit, by claiming that the people at NAG have no idea where it is, and that it's located "just south of the middle of nowhere". And in a reply to another letter, he again makes fun of Nelspruit and the gamers (the people that NAG supposedly caters to [sic]) that live there. And then he goes off about his BMW again, and open source being stupid, and then he asks, "What exactly does this have to do with gaming BTW?" Hello genius, try reading your own damn magazine every now and then, and you'll see it's about more than just gaming... there's anime, role-playing, the Internet etc. They're all there! This certainly isn't the first time this has happened. I'm appalled that everyone else just acts like everything is okay. Well I'm fed up. I won't buy NAG again until either this guy cleans up his act, or is replaced by someone a little more competent. *Thanks for pointing out an obvious flaw in my approach to how I treat people. I used to feel guilty about some of the replies I wrote to readers. I even laughed out loud sometimes as I disrespected gamer after gamer. I really must thank you for being so open and honest about this issue and as a reward you are the letter/post of the moment for July. Sorry Nelspruit gamers, AMD owners, Mazda 323 drivers and anyone else I've insulted, hurt or ignored over the years. I will mend my ways starting this issue.* **NAG Ed.**

FROM Nick

SUBJECT Sound-Base

I have had a rather interesting topic on my mind recently and am wondering if you gentlemen and gentle ladies at NAG can help me put my thoughts to rest. Two games have kept me fiddling with my keyboard recently and these are Half-Life 2 and Call of Duty: United Offensive. The thing I just don't understand is where the studios that make these games get all their sounds. I can understand that the speech parts are just recorded at a studio somewhere but I can't warm to the idea of where they get all the gunshots and background sounds? Does Valve and so on make or record their sounds themselves or do they get them from a sound studio that makes or records all the sounds for big game development companies. Secondly do all these sound studios (if they even exist) record their sounds or generate them with a computer generating their sounds?

Dear Nick, firstly thank you for your letter and rather interesting question. I'll try my best to answer as completely as possible. Please remember that I'm no sound effect specialist, but do know that these effects are either created from scratch using everyday items such as pounding a log into the ground [this might be recorded for a large monster walking around], created artificially using a variety of samples or simply purchased from a sound effect library. I've just covered the basics in this brief reply so I suggest searching the Internet using a search engine such as Google [www.google.com] for a more complete answer to your question. As much as I'd like to discuss this in-depth there really isn't enough space here. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Hennie

SUBJECT Pixel Shader

Dear NAG I love the great magazine but I want to know what is a pixel shader?

Hi Hennie, thanks for the mail. There is no simply way to answer this question as the definition requires the further explanation of other terms and so on. My suggestion is to visit this site: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pixel_shader to find out more. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Naven

SUBJECT Thank you for the cover DVD!!!

NAG Magazine has constantly improved its image and streamlined its content to the needs and requirements of its demanding readers. I have been an avid reader for many years now, and the constant evolution of NAG has never ceased to fascinate me – I even prefer to buy my magazine from a retail outlet rather

than to trust the Post Office with my subscription.

I write this letter with a huge degree of admiration and gratitude to a team who is able to bring us a stunning magazine, coupled with a jam packed DVD of the latest game demos and movies and yet still can find it in their hearts to keep the price down. In today's world, upgrades, improvements and enhancements usually imply increased costs however, it's encouraging to note that there are a few organisations out there that are still determined to ensure that progress is not hampered by financial constraints. I usually read my NAG cover to cover within a week and exhaust the contents of the cover CD within two weeks. This month however, your DVD has kept me so occupied that I just realised that a new edition will be out pretty soon – and I can't wait! My wife even enjoys playing some of the demos and is fast developing an interest in gaming. We are both pretty young (24 and 23) and the huge assortment of demos on your cover DVD made us feel like kids in a toy store – we were bound to find something that caught our attention! Once again, thank you for opting to use DVDs for future editions – this really is a huge benefit for SA gamers who want to enjoy all the latest gaming demos at a reasonable price. It will also ensure that the majority of today's games get the necessary exposure to potential purchasers; hence we should also see a welcome increase in sales in the near future. I will remain a faithful reader to a magazine that has its readers' interests at heart. Well done to you and your team!

Dear Naven, thank you so much for your kind words. It's not often that I receive letters like this. I'm also thrilled to hear your wife is also taking such a keen interest in gaming - I predict a happy and prosperous marriage for both of you.

NAG Ed.

FROM Martin

SUBJECT Power of Sound

I've been planning on getting some proper sound for some time, particularly since my aging hi-fi has been steadily tottering off into the Twilight Zone. So in February I installed my new soundcard, a Creative SoundBlaster Audigy2 ZS, and already my two budget desktop speakers were sounding as if they've been traded in for some newer models. Even on relatively cr**py speakers, there is just no comparison between onboard sound and a dedicated soundcard. Little was I to know, however, the impact that high quality speakers would make. Since speakers represent a rarity in the world of the light-speed evolving PC, i.e. you can install them and still be up-to-date by the time you reach your friend's house to brag about your new acquisition. I decided to have at least one other top-end

component. So I went for Creative's GigaWorks S750 – Seven 70W satellite speakers and one 210W subwoofer. A heavy box and a lovely price tag, but... unless you've attended a Formula 1 race or stood at Cape Canaveral during a Shuttle launch, you have not experienced the true power of sound. A game of Call of Duty causes the neighbours to believe that they've woken up in Tikrit, and blowing up a Vaygr Destroyer in my beloved Homeworld 2 causes cracks to slither down my walls and dust to fall from the ceiling. When my legionary cohorts start to march on the enemy in Rome – Total War, shivers run down my spine as the earth trembles beneath me. Strangely, car alarms seem to go off more regularly while I'm playing games now—not that I hear them, but I have been told. Everyone always clamour about the latest offerings from NVIDIA and ATI, but they neglect the power of sound. I for one would rather struggle forth with my Radeon 9600XT, while enveloped in the glory that is quality surround sound. How long my walls will remain standing, is another matter altogether. So I say, invest in high quality sound. I'm sure at some future upgrading point I'll have to replace my soundcard, since the PCI slot is now on death row, but I'm pretty sure that 10, 15 years from now, these same speakers will still be scattered around whatever my PC will look like, kicking some serious ass. And that's money well spent.

PS ... I don't work for Creative; although they're of course welcome to sponsor me! I include my details even though I've been told that hope is the first step on the road to disappointment. "They" must work for the company that manufactures Prozac. Or be hoping for sponsorship.

Dear Martin, thank you for taking the time to write to NAG. I like your point about the power of sound and couldn't agree more with you when it comes to this largely ignored aspect of gaming enhancement. I like to think of buying dedicated audio hardware as a sound investment if you'll excuse the pun. Unlike expensive 3D cards, dedicated sound hardware [card and speakers] will last years instead of months. In Hollywood, directors often use sound to fool the brain into 'seeing' things that never happen, such as a door slamming after a heated argument between a couple - this slamming and then, say the screeching of tyres sends a clear image to the brain without you having to see anything. Although we have yet to see this used extensively in games, it's only a matter of time until game developers start using this technique more extensively.

NAG Ed.

FROM Lisa

SUBJECT Parental guidance is advised

I'm a casual gamer – my husband challenges me to a bout of

Quake Arena now and then. Let's get to the point. In your April issue a distraught mother raised her cry of agony as to what an evil, benevolent magazine you guys are running – I felt compelled to return my opinion.

Dear agonised parental unit:

No, it is not the magazine or incessant game playing that is ruining your offspring's young life, it's your lack of discipline or the application thereof. You say that you feel guilty, yet you don't do anything about the real problem – your son.

Some simple moderation techniques might be your answer to the problem, but blaming a magazine is a bit immature. How about restricting his allowance or refusing to let him buy a new game until his marks improve? There are many things you can do to actually help your son. Don't just sit there and blame the magazine. Blaming the magazine is like blaming cars for road accidents and not the drivers' poor handling. And a warning label? Please! A magazine is not like a packet of cigarettes! Adult gamers do read this magazine as well you know. Besides, the problem of your son's apparent lack of enthusiasm for education should not be tied to the gaming industry alone. You are also a part of his education and I would like to think as his mother your influence upon his decision making should be greater. In the end – it will be society that will blame you for the up bringing of your child and every mistake you make will be noted.

Hi Lisa, it's so nice to see the ladies sending in mail every once in a while. I couldn't agree more... NAG is often blamed for just about anything you can imagine [including corrupting the youth]. I find that whenever a child falls victim to anything, be it drugs, alcohol, peer pressure or, heaven forbid, playing games, there's a parent who is to blame. But because it's difficult to accept blame for your child's behaviour, most people usually lash out at the last thing they remember their child enjoying. This isn't a new problem and if you look back in recent history, there has always been some evil corrupting the youth - from rock and roll to pet rocks. **NAG Ed.**

FROM J4Z3

SUBJECT Help!!!

Help!!! I hope someone can read this. I've been trapped for about three hours now on a damned Martian base that seems to have gone to hell, and a few things have occurred to me. For one, I must have suffered a stroke or something on the way here, because everybody can talk to me. That seems okay though because people I run into seem to know exactly what I'd like to say, and answer me as if I've actually spoken – maybe I've got really expressive eyes or something. That would explain why I wasn't issued a helmet, when every other marine has

one. Or even a map, for that matter. You'd think they'd have given me one in my PDA. Go figure - that's the military for you. But if someone does read this, could you please at least send me a piece of tape so I can attach my flashlight to my bloody shotgun? You'd think they would have invented a gun with a flashlight on in the 23rd century. Oh well - at least I've got my good looks!

Dear J4Z3. I'm distressed to learn of your perilous situation and have alerted the relevant authorities immediately.

Please try and remain calm until help arrives - we're doing everything we can. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Byt3

SUBJECT Mail

What's the shortest mail you have ever received? Just wondering.

Hi Byt3, nice try there, but unfortunately you're about nine words over the shortest ever. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all those readers out there who took the time to try and send in the shortest mail ever. This unofficial competition was the source of hours of entertainment and amusement, but is now closed. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Gory

SUBJECT Review RCT3

Well done on a great magazine. Proudly South African as well. Anyway, I was just wondering how come no mention was made in the Roller Coaster Tycoon 3 Review of the fact that you can actually ride the coasters....Duh! Surely this is what the game is really about. Come on, admit it...you have to love roller coasters. *Hi Gory. Just for the record, sometimes due to space limitations, we're not able to cover each game in as much detail as we'd like. This is a side effect of there being so many games on release each month. Rest assured. We are looking at this issue and will address the problem sometime soon.* **NAG Ed.**

The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by EA Africa. The winner receives 2 games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch



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The year 2006 will truly be the year of the Console – behold the powerhouse Triumvirate

SONY HAS THE POWER, MICROSOFT HAS THE SUPPORT AND NINTENDO HAS THEIR VISION. THE CONSOLE WARS HAVE CHANGED. THE BATTLE'S NO LONGER WAGED WITH AMMUNITION OF HARD-HITTING TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS - SHEETS OF NUMBERS FEW PEOPLE UNDERSTAND, BUT INSIST ARE CRUCIAL FOR GAMING ENJOYMENT. EVOLVED, THE CONFLICT IS NOW ONE OF BRINGING GAMING TO THE WIDEST AUDIENCE: WHICH CONSOLE CAN APPEAL MOST TO THE MAINSTREAM, THE NON-GAMERS AND THOSE WHOSE WALLETS GAMING HAS NOT YET EMPTIED.

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A New Hope

Microsoft's Xbox 360

// I'M NOT LAUNCHING THE Xbox 360 on MTV

because nobody's ever freakin' done it before," said Peter Moore, corporate Vice President of Xbox marketing and publishing, "I'm launching it [on MTV] because I think that's the way of the future. The way of the future is to bring a platform to life directly to the consumer in an entertainment-based manner."

Microsoft has managed to equate rock music and sex symbols with raw power and the slick white bevel of their game console. They've built upon what Sony initially started, making gaming more hip than it's ever been, bringing it into the mainstream limelight as never before. On paper the laundry-list hardware specifications for the console are impressive. Every powerful component adds up to something monstrously powerful, but this is not where the battle is to be fought. The PS 3 is equally powerful (slightly more powerful, actually, but there are other factors involved), so these two console behemoths will have to find some other way to grab from each other's respective user base.

Microsoft has learned its lessons well, as was intended from the start. When Microsoft launched the original Xbox console it tested the waters, looked at user reactions and made a close study of what the market wanted. The initial Xbox was never meant to be an overwhelming success, but rather to pave the way for the 360.

Microsoft's Xbox 360



It looks like Microsoft learned from its mistakes with the Xbox controller, and games like Dead Rising boasts the console's power with large amounts of characters and impressive graphics. The possible downside to the 360 is Live, which might be too bandwidth demanding for SA's market.

Initial reactions to the design of the 360 oscillate comfortably through the spectrum, but most people would agree that it looks less like a console and more like an iPod. Aside from a visual statement designed to appeal to the mainstream, Microsoft has made personalisation a key factor with the 360. Users will be able to remove the faceplate either to replace it with a custom-painted one of their own, or a purchased faceplate.

Utterly minimalist, the 360 hides its logo discreetly on the DVD disc tray and sides of the system. Only the infrared DVD remote port, binding button for the four wireless controllers, central power button and two USB ports break up the otherwise simple veneer.

Unlike the initial Xbox (which comprised primarily of off-the-shelf PC components), the 360 has been built from the ground up specifically for maximum power. The CPU with its three symmetrical cores (running at 3.2GHz each) allows for parallel processing, depending on what the games require. For example, a game can divide its physics calculations, artificial intelligence equations and animation systems between the three cores as it sees fit, each core focusing entirely on the task it's been given. Basically it's like having three separate computers that can each work 100% on the task it's been given. The ATI graphics-chip seems up to the task. Its 48 parallel processing units needed to fulfil

Microsoft's mandate that all 360 games can run at 720 pixels (progressive) and 1080 pixels (interlaced) on High Definition TVs.

Supporting just about every format under the sun, Microsoft wants the 360 to be the ultimate solution in terms of a multimedia centre for the home. It can play movies, music and even stream media wirelessly to or from wireless devices (such as the PSP, Microsoft has said without a trace of irony).

Shipping with a removable factory-standard 20GB hard drive (twice the size of the first Xbox drive), the fact that the drive is removable suggests that 360 owners will perhaps be able to upgrade their hard drives to bigger and better ones, though Microsoft has yet to comment on this facet.

The most exciting aspect of the 360 isn't its power, or even its customisability. As most broadband-capable countries have already found with the first Xbox, Microsoft has managed to pull off something wondrous with its online service, Xbox Live. Live managed to redefine online gaming for consoles and Microsoft is taking it even further with the launch of the 360. Live will be updated and new features will be added to make it even more seamless with the console and the gaming experience itself. The basic, free 'Silver' Live membership comes with the 360 and allows anyone with broadband access to use services such as free parlour games (chess,

checkers), voice chat and messaging with people on your friends' list. Silver membership also grants you access to the new micro-transaction marketplace where users will be able to purchase game demos, soundtracks, levels and other content for their games by using points (points are either purchased using a credit card, bought at a retail store or amassed by selling your own creations online in the Live marketplace). The only thing Silver membership doesn't grant you, is the ability to play Live-enabled (i.e., online) games on Live itself. For that, the Gold membership is required and costs a monthly fee. With all the new advancements to Live (such as persistent gamer rankings, spectator modes and even sponsored online multiplayer events, where players can pay to enter an online competition), Gold membership certainly seems worth the nominal fee associated with it.

Overall the 360 is a sleek, powerful package with astonishing capabilities for both single player and multiplayer experiences. Xbox Live might well be the determining factor in the upcoming battle between Sony and Microsoft, with Live bringing online gaming to anyone, anytime with the required ease and expected functionality. The 360 is expected to go on sale this November or just before Christmas with an unprecedented world-wide release. It is not known at this stage if the 360 will be sold in South Africa.

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THE CONSOLE TRIUMVIRATE



The Empire Strikes Back

Sony's PlayStation 3

AS ON THE 2ND of June 2005, Sony Computer Entertainment has shipped a worldwide total of 90 million PlayStation 2 units (this includes the silver and slim units).

Ninety million is a very large number and possibly the most representative of just how far PlayStation 2 has infiltrated the households of the world. It's amazing how far Sony has come with the PlayStation brand; the first PlayStation being an entirely underpowered and faulty system (compared to its peers of that generation), yet somehow managing to capture the imagination of the more mainstream gamers (thanks to Sony's deft marketing at the non-gaming culture) and succeeding despite its shortcomings.

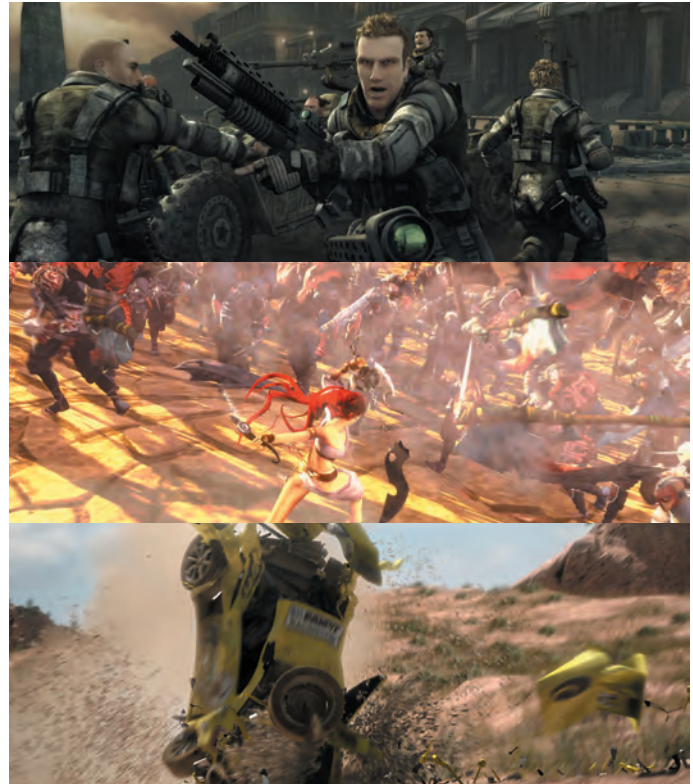
It's clear that Sony doesn't want to give up even the tiniest slice of its market to Microsoft. The PlayStation 3 can only be described as a powerhouse of excessive force. Sony has pulled out all the stops with the PlayStation 3, which are both its strength and its weakness. Containing advanced technology for unrivalled graphics is one thing, but when that power is very difficult to develop games for, one has to worry.

At the heart of the PlayStation 3 lies the Cell Processor, a very complex system which uses a PowerPC Core (at 3.2Ghz) to govern

Sony's PlayStation 3



The PS3 was met with a lot of controversy. Apart from the prototype controller not igniting attendee imaginations, the videos showing off real-time footage from Killzone PS3, Heavenly Sword and Motorstorm had such high graphic fidelity that some people are convinced they were pre-rendered.



eight smaller SPEs (Synergistic Processing Elements) also running at 3.2Ghz. Only seven of the SPEs are actually used (one is reserved for redundancy), but this still means that, effectively, the PlayStation 3 has seven 3.2GHz processors, each with two hardware threads. Combined with the special NVIDIA developed RSX graphics-chip, the PlayStation 3 has plenty of power to go around. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the Cell Processor, it is very difficult to develop for and there is a lot of speculation that Sony might have a problem on its hands with it. Smaller companies might find the PlayStation 3 too daunting/complex to develop for, cutting out a lot of prospective games (which would then move over to the Xbox 360 which is actually very easy to develop for). Regardless, one only has to look at the Killzone 2 (working title) or Unreal Tournament 2007 screenshots and videos to get an idea of just how powerful the PlayStation 3 is.

Sony has announced that the PlayStation 3 will have a detachable 2½-inch hard disk (a laptop hard disk, specifically), though Sony has yet to announce if this will come bundled with the system or if it will be a separate purchase. Sony also still has to announce the use for this hard disk, aside from using your PlayStation 3

as a media centre. The PlayStation 3 has four front USB ports (2.0) and two on the back, a port of the conventional Memory Stick as well as one port for SD cards (standard/mini) and a CompactFlash port. It's not yet known what the ports will allow and if you'll be able to put save-games on SD instead of the Memory Stick and so on.

As with all the upcoming consoles, the PlayStation 3 is Wi-Fi enabled and also has a standard Ethernet port. Surprisingly, the wireless controllers (the design of which is still tentative) for the PlayStation 3 use Bluetooth 2.0, and up to seven controllers can be paired with the PlayStation 3. Sony has not commented on why one would want to have so many controllers, but at least the controllers can charge their lithium-ion batteries through the USB ports of the PlayStation 3. Sony has mentioned that it will actually be possible to stream media, such as music and movies, to and from your PlayStation Portable using the Wireless capabilities of the PlayStation 3. However, Sony has neglected to mention anything about the PlayStation 3 and online gaming. It is known that they intend to push Sony Online, an online gaming service, but that's all that has been announced.

Gamers with large PlayStation and

PlayStation 2 game collections will be pleased to know that the PlayStation 3 is fully backwards compatible with both PlayStation 1 games and PlayStation 2 games. PlayStation 3 games will come on the new Blu-ray standard of discs, which allow for a rather impressive 50GB of storage. How this will impact the cost of games is not yet known, though market analysts predict that the next generation of PlayStation games will be priced higher than the current games, simply due to the extra time/money involved in developing much larger and more impressive games.

Not only is the PlayStation 3 fully HD (High Definition) compatible (with up to 1080 pixels progressive), it actually has two video-out ports allowing for two televisions to be connected to the PlayStation 3. This could allow for much easier split-screen gaming (since it would technically use two televisions), but could also be used to display extra information on a second screen, such as a map of a racetrack or information about quests you have to complete, depending entirely on what game developers feel like using it for. There is still a lot of time to speculate however, with the PlayStation 3 only due in the US sometime in 2006, with an expected European (and thus South African) release in 2007.

"WE EXIST FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME."

REGGIE FILS-AIME, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT SALES & MARKETING, NINTENDO AMERICA



Return of the Jedi

Nintendo's Revolution

VIDEOGAMES AND GAMING AS we know it is now entering its Rock 'n Roll era. Big names, big budgets and even bigger egos are all gearing up for possibly the biggest entertainment explosion since The Beatles. Just like the music from the unapologetically British group managed to appeal to a much wider audience than music ever had before, gaming is charging headlong into the new 'everyone' territory.

Nintendo started its origins as a humble toy company, but bravely led the industry foray into the early videogame boom. Nintendo is a household name, associated with well-fed Italian plumbers, slightly effeminate princess-saving elves, barrel throwing simians and other aspects of the now older generation's gaming childhood. Nintendo pioneered handheld gaming with its Game & Watch product line, not to mention the celebrated and long-running Game Boy series.

But mistakes were made, very costly mistakes detrimental to the health of Nintendo. They ostracised developers with their iron-fisted control over their Nintendo

Nintendo's Revolution



Nintendo President Satoru Iwata holds up the Revolution prototype. While no game details were announced, expect regulars like Link from Legend of Zelda to appear on the console.

64 console, losing valuable partnerships to upstart Sony and their PlayStation. Years later Nintendo failed to secure enough triple-A titles for its GameCube console, despite the GameCube being enough of a contender for both the older PlayStation 2 and the newer Xbox from Microsoft, leaving the GameCube to slowly slide out of the console race.

Seemingly unperturbed by this, Nintendo has announced its next upcoming console, the Nintendo Revolution. At the front of their media barrage is the catchphrase "All-Access Gaming", Nintendo's new wide-ranging strategy to attract more kinds of gamers to more kinds of games (which is eerily similar to both Sony and Microsoft's new campaigns, hence reaffirming the battlefield for the upcoming console war).

Unfortunately, Nintendo has decided to reveal very little about its new console. What Nintendo has revealed, however, can speak both volumes and very little, depending on what you expect from a console.

The Revolution's design seems to emphasise compactness. The entire unit will (according to Nintendo) be the diminutive size of three standard DVD cases stacked together. Currently the Revolution's actual design is still tentative, though Nintendo seems quite happy with the current look of the console. A silver

stand will keep the console vertical if that's your thing, but the console can also lie down flat on its side.

Moving ahead to the software side, the Revolution will be backwards compatible with all the GameCube games. Instead of the conventional tray, the Revolution has a self-loading media bay that plays the 12cm optical discs used for the new system, as well as the GameCube discs. Apparently you will also be able to purchase a small, self-contained attachment to play movies and other DVD content, but Nintendo has not been very forthcoming with information on this.

In a most unexpected move, Nintendo has moved away from their proprietary memory cards for saving games, and instead the Revolution will accept SD memory cards for expanding the internal 512MB flash memory, making the entire memory card endeavour a much more affordable experience.

Technically, the Revolution is a big unknown right now in terms of processing and graphical power. Nintendo is focusing more on advertising the Revolution's 'Secret Weapon', namely the fact that it's a 'virtual console'. The Revolution will have downloadable access to 20 years of games originally released for the Nintendo Entertainment System, the Super Nintendo Entertainment System and

the Nintendo 64. These downloadable titles will have to be purchased, unfortunately, though Nintendo president Satoru Iwata has mentioned that some games might be used as promotional bonuses - for example, offering a free download of an old game with the purchase of a new game, or running special marketing campaigns which allow games to be downloaded for free for a limited period.

Nintendo has also not yet commented if the downloadable titles will be playable over the Revolution's online Wi-Fi enabled gaming service, though initial reports don't consider this likely. There are a number of expected Wi-Fi enabled launch titles that will take advantage of Nintendo's newly announced service, Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. Though once again, there is little information on this service and how it will match up to Microsoft's exemplary Live service.

The Revolution certainly cannot compete with either the Xbox 360 and the PlayStation 3 in terms of raw power, but it has a charm of its own (albeit aimed at the Nintendo fans) that might just carry it far enough, coupled with Nintendo's new open-arms policy towards developers and its usual line-up of licences (including Mario, Metroid and Zelda). There has been no release date announced for the Revolution, other than a tentative '2006'.

The Future is Nigh-ish



THE NINTENDO REVOLUTION IS a wildcard; there simply isn't enough information to determine how it's going to compete with the big boys. The Xbox 360 will be released so soon one can almost taste it, but its most appealing feature (Xbox Live) is one that may just not be viable for South Africa and its lack of a decent broadband infrastructure (not to mention it's not even clear if Microsoft plans on releasing the Xbox 360 in SA). That leaves the PlayStation 3 and its expected 2007 release date - leaving more than enough room for changes, speculation and revelations. Not to mention, the PlayStation 3 will most likely be the most expensive console of the lot with an estimated retail price of over \$300. One thing is certain however; in terms of sheer graphical capability, processing power and features, the next generation of consoles is unlike anything gamers have ever seen before. One only has to look at screenshots from Killzone 2 (working title), an upcoming PlayStation 3 title to realise just how far graphically consoles have come. In fact, to date most people still believe the Killzone 2 video shown at the Sony Press Conference is a fake. However, looking at Gears of War on the Xbox 360 and Unreal Tournament 2007 on both the 360 and the PlayStation 3, it's quite obvious that the bar has been raised so fast, people's heads are still spinning. The dividing line between computer and consoles has all but vanished, with consoles no longer relegated to 'inferior hardware'. In fact, the next generation of consoles will simply be more powerful than the expected computer hardware of the same time, raising many interesting questions about the future of computers in the mainstream industry of videogames. **NAG**

The GameBoy Micro

IT WAS QUITE A surprise when Nintendo of America's executive vice president of sales & marketing, Reggie Fils-Aime reached into his coat pocket before a captivated audience at the Nintendo Press Conference in Los Angeles and softly said: "Now I know you haven't seen this yet".

What he pulled out was actually so small, the video cameras and spectators alike initially couldn't see it. Only 10cm wide, 5cm tall and a paltry 1.7cm deep, the Game Boy Micro certainly lives up to its namesake (and is certain to get lost easily). A continuation of the Game Boy lineage, the Micro can play all GBA games and comes complete with the standard face controls and shoulder buttons. Weighing in at less than 80 grams, it's amazing how the Game Boy Advance's technology has been crammed into such an utterly tiny package. Even its 5cm backlit screen shines with renewed vigour, giving GBA games a startling new clarity and colour fidelity. The system comes with a built-in rechargeable lithium-ion battery and supports standard headphones, as well as interchangeable face-plates allowing for trendy customisation. Reggie summed it up quite nicely when he said, "This is one handheld that will definitely fit in your jean pocket".





A quick chat with Brent Hamilton, Electronic Arts SA GM

Electronic Arts' new general manager, Brent Hamilton, might be a new hand in the gaming industry, but he comes from a rich background of experience in IT sales, management and industry and his resumé includes being at the helm of Dell South Africa. We sat down with him to chat about his new job, the local market and, naturally, cricket.

Are you guys putting pressure on making a more attractive cricket game?

If you look at the difference between Rugby 2004 and 2005, it's massive. The reason for that is because the game is developed in our studios in Canada. So we have the full resources of fifteen years of development experience. And the step-up in gameplay and graphics quality is huge. You can expect to see a similar thing with Cricket, because [cricket] was done in a similar way. It wasn't developed in a large studio, but done on a much smaller scale. Now Andrew Wilson, who was responsible for the new Rugby, is working on it and his commitment is that we can expect the same improvement in the Cricket game.

What are some of the challenges that you've noticed in this market?

There's two. Firstly - Distribution, to be honest. If you look at the number of consoles that were brought into the market here and you've got a country of 45 million people - clearly when given the demographics of the country, you can't say that whole 45 million is your target market. But you can say that between eight and ten million is our market. To give you an idea, we've got around 300,000 PlayStation 2s in the market. If you compare that to a place like Australia: they've got a very similar population through our addressable market and they have in the region of 3 million in PS2 and Xbox. Now we're a single-platform country at the moment - that's not a great situation to be in. We'd like to see Xbox and PS2 driving the market and getting games out to the masses.

Secondly?

The second thing is the pricing. When you look at Australia or the US, you talk about a console costing around R1,000 to R2,000, on direct comparison. Recently we were way above that - R1,800 to R2,000. We can have the

greatest games that you can ever make in the world, but if we don't have the hardware, the consoles, out there, it restricts our growth. So that's something that I can see coming - that we have this huge opportunity for Microsoft to step into the market, to push prices down and up availability. There was a shortage of PS2s over Christmas; in a single console market if you don't get the hardware out, we don't sell the games. So that's really something that is frustrating. And it's something that I am going to continue working on in a constructive manner. 300,000 consoles versus 3 million - that's a huge opportunity. And on top of that we're a huge gaming market. People here who own consoles love playing games; they typically buy more games per head than most other countries.

Looking at the casual market, is the growth less, the same or more than you expected?

I think you have to separate it. The console market should be much bigger than this. I think the games are very dependent on that. Our business is growing 20-25% a year; I think that's a very healthy position to be in given that the thing that restricts the growth is the number of consoles out there. But we can definitely grow the market faster. I think it needs to be collaborative, it needs to be a combined effort from the hardware manufacturers and also from the publishers. Our ideal situation is that every one who wants a console should have one. So you need to work on making affordability less of an issue.

For such a small local market, there is a lack of cooperation between the game companies. Do you have plans to forge better relationships with your competitors?

Absolutely. I've had minimal interaction with them in the past few months for the simple



reason of learning the industry. When you meet these people, you've got to at least understand where you're coming from. But going forward we would really like to get some sort of forum where we can work together to grow the market productively. Obviously we're the only publisher that's directly represented in the country, so that puts us in a clearly unique position. And I know that it puts some of the distributors under different pricing structures. So we want to create some cohesion in the market whilst making sure that we don't compromise our competitiveness. Because ultimately the consumer has to be the winner, else the market won't grow. **NAG**

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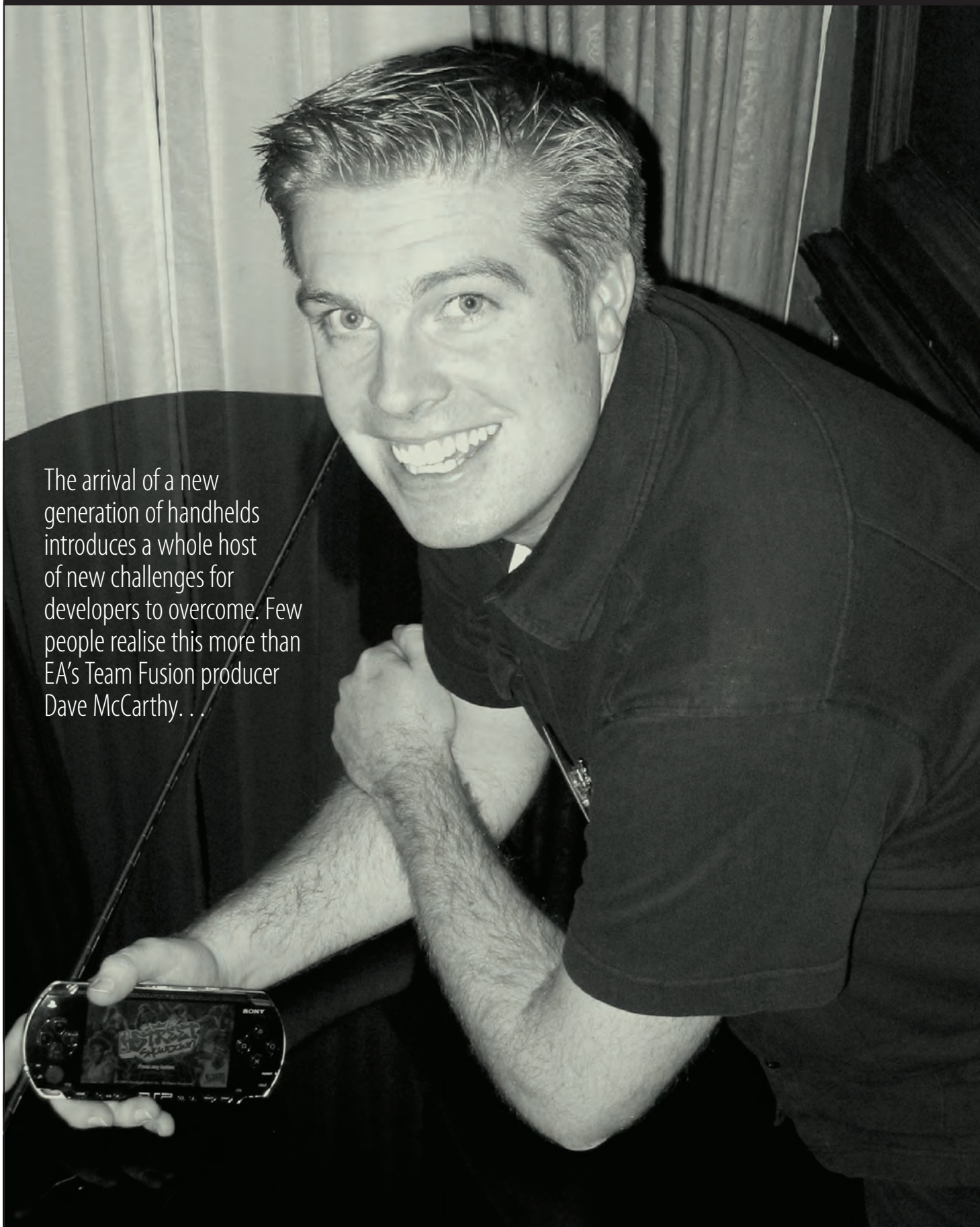
PlayStation®2

www.PlayStation.co.za



INTERVIEW

The arrival of a new generation of handhelds introduces a whole host of new challenges for developers to overcome. Few people realise this more than EA's Team Fusion producer Dave McCarthy. . .



DAVE MCCARTHY

ELECTRONIC ARTS / TEAM FUSION

THERE AREN'T MANY COMPANIES in the videogame industry that could afford to create a whole new section to deal solely with the development of handheld titles, but one that certainly could is Electronic Arts. And guess what? That's exactly what it's done.

Back in September 2003, Team Fusion was created when EA brought producers Warren Wall and Dave McCarthy together – that was it, just the two of them. Now, a year and a half later, Team Fusion consists of over 200 programmers and game designers – EA certainly knows how to throw together a team. The scale of this studio is a good indication of how seriously EA is taking the handheld market this time around, so we decided to track down Dave McCarthy to find out what warrants such an effort.

"I think that Team Fusion is important for a few reasons," McCarthy begins. "We could have treated the PSP launch titles we're working on internally as if they were just to be released on another platform. But the danger of doing this with these titles is that there would be a chance of competing priorities within teams and the games might not have gotten the attention that they needed."

After starting as an assistant producer on FIFA 97 back in 1996, Dave has been working on EA Sports titles non-stop. "Being the good Canadian kid I am, I just had to spend time on the NHL franchise" he smiles, but this commitment to the genre made him the perfect man to take on EA Sports' range of PSP launch titles.

"Having a standalone group allows us to give the titles the attention they deserve," he says. "I also think – and this has been my big learning experience over this past year – creating a compelling handheld title is a very different story from the big console games that I started on. There are things that need to be learnt, and as a separate group we can be dedicated and focus on the job at hand."

One thing that's been a concern of many gamers regarding all handhelds is whether we're going to get to a stage where we're just getting ports of old titles. It's a situation that's bothered GBA owners over the last year or so. So while we have one of the guys responsible for making these decisions sitting in front of us, we decide to pin him down. So, will this be the case, Mr McCarthy?

"If I go out as a consumer, as I do, I like to think that there are people out there who are trying to provide me with something new. Besides, with the new handhelds, many games simply wouldn't port well – it wouldn't work. Handhelds are played differently from consoles and the games should reflect this. You get interrupted a lot and you play for shorter amounts of time on a handheld. There just has to be changes if you want titles to work." It sounds like a positive answer, but it'll take more than a few minor tweaks to convince gamers to hand over their cash for a title that was beaten years ago.

A company that certainly understands the changes needed to make a worthy handheld title is Nintendo. The

The PSP makes things look good. I am proud of the level of visual quality we've achieved here in round one

DS has been designed with short periods of play in mind and the bulk of its titles reflect this by playing much like mini-games – not exactly the type of game for which EA is known. Fair enough, the odd title, such as Tiger Woods, has made its way onto the DS, but EA certainly seems to be concentrating its efforts on the PSP. "I certainly see value in the [DS]," McCarthy tells us. "I guess it just feels as if it's aimed at a different audience. We do have games coming out for the DS. The PSP is just a particularly strong fit for our games and content."

All this makes little difference to us here in the UK. *[And SA, Ed.]* Thanks to Sony's delay of the PSP's European launch, many of us still have a while to wait before we can take advantage of McCarthy's work. But this doesn't mean he'll have a chance to take it easy though. The handheld battle rages on and the rest of the world will be waiting for new titles tailor-made for shortening long flights and making bus rides seem that little bit more entertaining.

"After a bit of rest we'll be right back with a good selection of titles in time for Christmas," McCarthy assures us. "We're also looking at new and exciting IT opportunities, so there's no shortage of work to do..." **NAG**

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The Expo

rAge is a computer and console video gaming and technology consumer expo, bringing together the most popular games, technology, gadgets and products.

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Details

Friday 30 September 2005 10h00-18h00

Saturday 1 October 2005 10h00-18h00

Sunday 2 October 2005 10h00-16h00

Entry Fee

R30 per person

[Children under 8 free]



PREVIEWS

WANTED



Civilisation IV

PLATFORMS: PC **RELEASE DATE:** Q4 2005

Better graphics, more civilisations, extra leaders, real-time combat on the battlefield and a new tech tree are all reasons why this is a must have - especially if you're a fan of the series.



Final Fantasy XII

PLATFORMS: PS2 **RELEASE DATE:** 2005

It's a new Final Fantasy, this time on a world largely composed of Air Ships. It's also a fix for all the RPG junkies who need another dose of Square Enix magic. Our art director will give his new car for a copy.



Tomb Raider: Legend

PLATFORMS: PS2, Xbox, PC **RELEASE DATE:** TBA

We love the Tomb Raider games and the latest one can actually save the series. With a good title on the way, it's an excuse to spoil Lara rotten with lots of coverage. She'll kick our asses if she knew, though.

JAK X



DEVELOPER Naughty Dog **PUBLISHER** Sony **PLATFORMS** PS2 **RELEASE DATE** November 2005

The vehicle bits in Jak 3 were great, so the creators of the series decided that since they aren't planning another Jak game, why not create a Jak racer? With a dozen vehicles, 20 tracks, eight open arenas and tons of firepower, not to mention the trademark Jak & Daxter humour, Jak X definitely can't miss.

AGE OF CONAN

DEVELOPER Funcom **PUBLISHER** Funcom **PLATFORMS** PC **RELEASE DATE** Q2 2006

If your knowledge of Conan begins and ends with the movies, you have a lot to learn. This MMOG takes place after an aged Conan becomes the ruler of Hyboria. But, thanks to over 70 years of books, comics and other incarnations, the Conan universe has a lot to offer - and an online game couldn't be a better place for it.



MAGIC: THE GATHERING ONLINE 3.0

DEVELOPER Leaping Lizard **PUBLISHER** Wizards of the Coast **PLATFORMS** PC **RELEASE DATE** TBA



Magic: The Gathering's online incarnation has quietly become a massive hit for Wizards of the Coast. Details are a bit flat on what to expect in the third edition, but it will include new features and tournaments - which in turn means new decks and cards can be introduced to purchase online.

ODAMA

DEVELOPER Vivarium **PUBLISHER** Nintendo **PLATFORMS** GCN **RELEASE DATE** TBA



Odama gets a mention in the E3 supplement, but when the developers of the quirky Seaman are working on something new, you make a point about it - that and the fact that Odama falls in the obvious genre of 'RTS Pinball'. No, we don't get how that works either, but we really are eager to see Odama in action when it is released.

BAD DAY L.A.

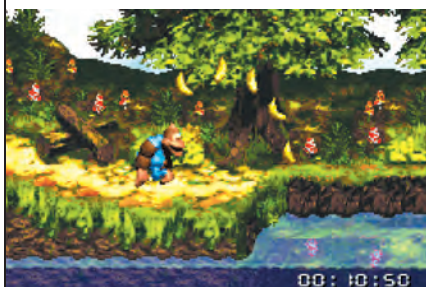
DEVELOPER Enlight **PUBLISHER** Enlight **PLATFORMS** PC, Xbox **RELEASE DATE** TBA



Now here's a concept we like. You are a homeless man pushing his trolley around in L.A. You just live from day to day, until you find purpose in stopping the sudden attack of terrorists, earthquakes and zombies - all in one day. What's a bum to do? By the looks of it, arm himself with a two-by-four and kick some ass.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 3

DEVELOPER Rare **PUBLISHER** Nintendo **PLATFORMS** GBA **RELEASE DATE** Q4 2005



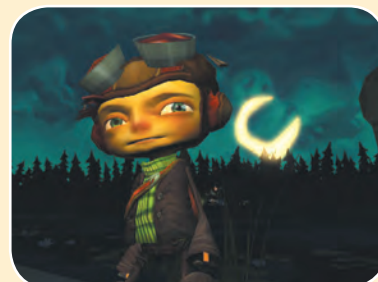
Hey, if another Donkey Kong game has you shaking your head in dismay, it's not for you anyway. Despite their split, Rare are still working on titles for Nintendo and the large ape's continuing adventures on the GBA is one of them. Pushing the GBA to its graphical limits, it will keep fans happy.

What we're playing at the NAG office ...



Restricted Area

Basically Diablo with guns. It's another bug-riddled, East European game that we love to hate, but we can't stop playing it. If they bring out a patch, there might not be a NAG next month.



Psychonauts

Rasputin is attending the Psychic Summer Camp and to become a Psychonaut, you dive into the heads of others to sort out there emotions, including a chap with a Napoleon complex. Killer.



Mercury

The trip to LA brought back copies of the incredibly addictive Mercury. Sloshing a glob of metal fluid across your PSP screen seems to be a real time killer.

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

■ Developer

Lionhead

■ Publisher

Activision

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

Management

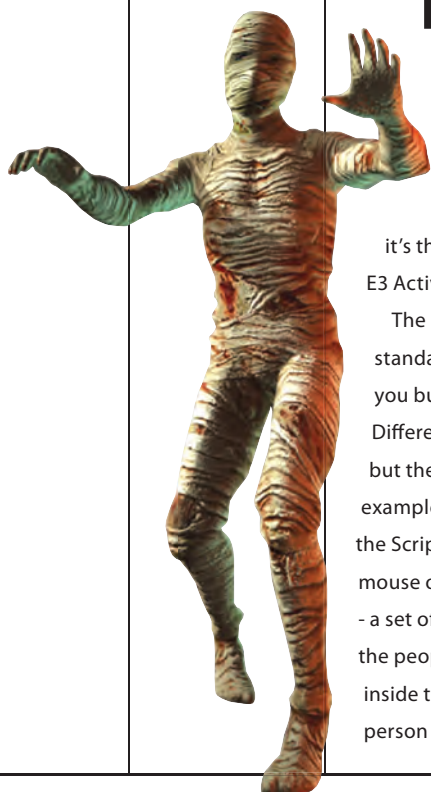
■ Release Date

Q3 2005



EXCLUSIVE

"Places everyone! We're about to start filming horses, houses and hijinx!"



THE MOVIES

THE IDEA BEHIND LIONHEAD'S *The Movies* is majestic: the ability to make any movie you want to, taking an actor/actress from obscurity to stardom and controlling an entire movie studio, using your judgment to determine the success of your cinematic creation. Everything about *The Movies* is grand, but it's the tiny touches that impressed us during the pre-E3 Activision press conference.

The initial form factor of *The Movies* is that of your standard management game. To build your studio you build (if funds and space permit) buildings. Different buildings not only attract different people, but they actually represent your available options. For example: once people have started queuing outside the Scriptwriter's Guild building, you simply hover your mouse over the building to reveal the 'menu blueprint' - a set of rooms that represent what you can do with the people queuing outside. Pick up and drop a person inside the building in the room you want, and that person will be hired and assigned a task such as writing





a script or being trained to become a better scriptwriter. When you pick up a person, little trails of glitter stream out and anchor inside various buildings, showing you the most logical thing to do with the person you've picked up. The most logical thing, however, doesn't always represent the best choice. You could give an actress cosmetic enhancements, but this has a variety of effects on both her ego and performance.

The manner in which each building you purchase actually becomes the menu with which to access more advanced features, is innovative and very functional - just one of the many small touches to The Movies that sets it apart from just being a management game (albeit a management game that allows you to produce entire movies).

Every other aspect of The Movies is still as exciting as they were when the game was first announced. It's

amazing how much control you can have (if you choose) over the movie-making process. Letting your hired directors take control of the production is quick and easy (except when your directors are alcoholics, thus requiring time in rehab), but making the movie yourself is entertaining and quite a creative outlet. Once the scriptwriters have come up with a plot (once again, if you don't do it yourself), you can change/adjust every aspect of it, from the lighting on the set to the actual actor's clothes and mannerisms. You can even record your own dialogue for the actors, whose mouths will match your spoken (or sung) words thanks to an advanced lip-sync engine.

Once the movie is complete, the in-game critics will have their say. And if you feel like it, you can even release the movie on the Internet to see what real people have to say about your creation. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC PS2 Xbox

Developer

Crystal Dynamics

Publisher

Eidos

Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

Genre

Action

Release Date

TBA



*This is why
Lara (unfortun-
ately?) doesn't
wear skirts*

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

AFTER THE SPECTACULAR LANDSLIDE of the series it's difficult to unearth enthusiasm for anything with the Tomb Raider badge on it. But the love for this character runs deeper than anyone will admit and with each addition to the series hopes are renewed and anticipation builds, albeit with a cautious toe. Why then should Legend be any different from the previous disasters? Well firstly Core is no longer involved with the franchise and secondly [not taking anything away from the rest of the current team]

Toby Gard is back on the job. Toby is the original creator of the legend that is Lara Croft. Convinced yet? We are, and all it took was half an hour behind closed doors in the Eidos meeting room at E3 to make us believers again. If there's any



truth to first impressions, then Legend impressed right from the first frame of animation. The section we were shown began with our lovely lass standing in the middle of a jungle setting. The scene reminded us of the excellent Tomb Raider II. As Lara starts moving the game world reacts as perfectly as we've come to demand. Sunlight pokes down through the foliage bathing Lara's new realistic form [besides a more authentic female body, a set of grenades, pistols, backpack and shotgun all feature on her person, not magically stored in a tiny backpack]. There is an immediate sense that the world is alive and reactive. Lara breaks from cover and stops at a roaring waterfall. The atmosphere is crisp and something about the distant ledge feels oddly familiar. Lara is restless standing still, her eyes are always looking around and she flexes muscles and twitches in all the right places – some consideration has been given to these idle animations, making her look alive. But enough staring and drooling. The first puzzle is an obvious pull the rope affair with some cinematic results. The waterfall parts like a curtain on a stage revealing more intrigue inside. Lara is now confronted with another simple problem, getting across a water pit. Here she pulls out her magnetic grapple [yes, it's new] and throws it across the water – it attaches to an unusually modern boat. Dragging the boat closer allows her to swing from two ropes to the other side of the water puzzle. The origins of the boat are revealed as she stumbles across an enemy character. He is no match for her twin pistols. But this isn't the end of the battle... Lara enters another room only to be greeted by more bullets. As they zing past her and slam into the walls and ground, she pulls her pistols and begins evasive action – locking onto each of the enemies. It's over all too quickly. Part of this attack involves Lara taking control of a turret, somersaulting while shooting and solving another puzzle. The demo ends with her acrobatic ascent up a stone structure. We see her leaning, intuitively reaching for ledges, and hand over hand movement, pull jumping vertically and thankfully dismounting difficult climbs with all the grace and flair we loved from the first game.

Because this is a game close to our hearts, okay, the Editor's heart, the designer was grilled long and hard – we went there to ensure they were making the game right this time. We learnt that the focus is definitely back on raiding tombs and exploration. We learnt that the trademark secrets were back in the game, no more little statues, just simple and deserving rewards for being observant and knowing how to control Lara well. The game will apparently cross a number of different continents and will definitely have some supernatural elements, although it was stressed that this wasn't just for the sake of it – everything will have purpose.



One of the more requested fixes for the game was the control system - less grid-based and more flexibility.

This will be Toby Gard's second Tomb Raider game [if you discount Tomb Raider Gold] – he's playing more of an overseeing role in terms of remaining true to the character of Lara Croft, something the developers feel is critical to the franchise. It'll do them little good to destroy the backpacking adventurer we all know and love. After all, the issue people had with the decline of the series was levelled at the play dynamic, locations and levels, storyline and enemies – never at Miss Croft. So preserving this legacy would be of some importance. Naturally, having Toby Gard involved means the rest of the team can draw on his vision and inspiration when putting Legend together.

From the detailed look we were afforded at E3 [approximately 25 minutes of play in a cavern complete with waterfall, perilous ledges, puzzles and classic 'Indiana Jones' mystique] and some extensive questioning of the lead designer, all the evidence indicates a return to all the good things that made the original game so much fun - that sense of wonder and adventure, the tricky but rewarding secrets and most importantly the exploration of exotic locations. Oh, the Croft mansion will also feature in the game too – hooray! **NAG**

A beautiful backdrop, an exotic location, and all you look at is her cleavage...



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms



■ Developer

2K Games

■ Publisher

Human Head Studios

3D Realms

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

■ Genre

FPS

■ Release Date

2006



EXCLUSIVE



"Well I certainly don't feel like a Doom ripoff, do you?"

QUESTION: WHAT GAME IS announced then sits in a cupboard for 15 years? Answer: Any game from 3D Realms. Prey was first announced in 1990, got delayed and then cancelled altogether. This title was all but forgotten until it appeared on the game list for E3 2005. Using the Doom 3 engine, developer Human Head [famous for Rune] is resurrecting this forgotten shooter.

The story here is important to tell because it sets the actual location of the game. The main character Tommy, a Native American Indian [Cherokee to be specific], visits his girlfriend and family on a remote Cherokee reservation when an alien ship arrives quite unexpectedly. In typical alien form, the ship abducts Tommy, his girl and granddad and a handful of other characters. The odd thing about this particular alien space ship is that the ship itself is the alien and within its innards live numerous alien species from previous abductions – creating something of an intergalactic cultural melting pot. Besides the various types of aliens, the ship has also swallowed various bits and pieces of metal and other inorganic material allowing the alien's 'visitors' to build your more traditional military-base style corridors and rooms inside. This is a smart setting for a game of this nature as it allows for many oddities, and all in a nicely confined space.

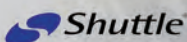
Besides throwing tons of new aliens, locations and weapons into the overcrowded first person shooter genre, Prey's unique selling point is the lead character's Cherokee heritage. You'll play in two different modes: the real meat and bones version of yourself and a more ethereal version. In the spirit plane, you're able to walk

through walls and shoot enemies with your spirit bow. While in this mode your real body is susceptible to attack. Another, less unique aspect of Prey is the use of portals. You and a few of the local inhabitants are able to use portals which transport you to different parts of the ship. But don't expect to be standing upright when you travel through some of them, or even experience the same gravity on the other side – they can link very different types of locations. In more Cherokee folklore and hat tipping, your grandfather and a spirit hawk, Talon, will guide and assist your character through the game by translating alien languages and offering words of wisdom. The developers are also big on puzzles, and if you're expecting to glide through Prey on the back of a rocket launcher think again – about time really, as we're all getting a little tired of the mindlessness so favoured in the FPS genre. Besides all that, expect some weird evil ethereal manifestations, cool alien weaponry and incredibly complex levels. **NAG**





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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms



■ Developer

Monolith Productions

■ Publisher

Vivendi Universal Interactive

■ Supplier

MIDigital [011] 723 1967

■ Genre

FPS

■ Release Date

Q4 2005



EXCLUSIVE



F.E.A.R.

*Be scared, be
very scared, or
is that afraid?*

CONTINUING THE PARADE OF simple but catchy-titled shooters, we have FEAR (somewhat more solid on the ground than Prey due to the fact that we've actually played some real code on this one and have the cap to prove it). To distinguish itself from the rest of the pack, FEAR takes a different approach to the FPS genre by adding a heavy element of creepiness to the proceedings (there's just something about possessed children wandering around dark hallways that makes the skin crawl). FEAR is definitely going to freak you out – let's just hope you don't empty that clip into your foot as you squeal in terror while trying to back away. Boo!

Anyway, back to the serious stuff. You're part of First Encounter Assault Recon. A paranormal research team that tends to investigate these – let's call them disturbances – with lethal force instead of microscopes and white lab coats. The story involves all the usual pain, suffering and saving the world type stuff, which you'll quickly forget once you see the lovely graphics and physics this game has to offer – as good as, if not better, than the mighty Half-Life 2.

But never mind all that. Above all else, the most surprising aspect of the game was the artificial intelligence. Once you've become a jaded game journalist with a few years of experience under the belt, games become predictable and enemy artificial intelligence laughable, resulting in bold attacks with little regard for the

consequences. This attitude landed us in trouble as FEAR presented a slickly coordinated and ultimately deadly defence and counter-attack. It required four [count them] attempts to breach. If this is the calibre of the AI at this stage, then FEAR is shaping up to be the first truly challenging shooter we've seen in ages. FEAR also features a slow motion feature. By pressing a key ['Ctrl' in this case], you enter this 'mode' where everything slows down except you; heightened awareness or something arbitrarily similar. We'll call it bullet time to save explanation. Another startling aspect of FEAR is the gruesome violence and gore. We haven't seen this much blood and bone since the original Quake, with Soldier of Fortune coming a close second. FEAR features lovely visuals, plenty of weapons and things to shoot at, as well as some of the best AI ever. And to cap it off, genuinely scary situations that'll have you bumping in the night. Definitely not one for the kids. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

Platforms

360 PC

Developer

Raven Software | id Software

Publisher

Activision

Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

Genre

FPS

Release Date

TBA



*"There's
a liiiight,
over at the
frankenstein
place!"*



QUAKE IV

FOR THE MORE hardcore fans of the Doom legacy, Quake IV will feature an actual character with - wait for it - a name. His name is Matthew Kane [not Cane as some less aware journalists have reported]. They've also gone for a text based logo [we couldn't figure out where they'd put the fourth nail either]. For the rest of you, Quake IV was demonstrated at an exclusive Activision press conference before the madness of E3 began. We were there and we left impressed. Todd Hollenshead and Tim Willits from id Software presented the demonstration and this involved about 20 minutes of actual live playing and a brief Q&A session. The demonstration opened with some excellent video footage summarising the plot in about 20 seconds. Quake IV starts where Quake II ended - now that the Big Gun is disabled and the Strogg leader [the Macron] is dead, marines can land on the surface, but the battle is

far from over... blah and so on. In a nutshell: go forth and kick more Strogg butt.

Initial impressions were not good. It looked exactly like Doom 3 on speed with the same looking corridors, dark and spooky areas and an all too familiar feel, but this impression quickly ended as the scene expanded to include outside bits that had giant machines pounding overhead while you take cover below. So far so good. Moving on, this is such widespread news that you're bound to hear about it long before you play the game - players will become a Strogg to complete the game. There are also vehicle sections [you control a mechanised walker], closer cooperation with team mates etc.

Things that have been changed for Quake IV based on the Doom III engine include the ability to upgrade or modify weapons. The one example highlighted was the rocket launcher - in modified form it will fire guided missiles.

In terms of multiplayer, all that was stated, despite repeated stupid questions from the French gaming press, is that more will be revealed at QuakeCon - id Software's annual Quake festival in Texas. Considering that this is their convention, what else do you expect? However, based on the portions of the game we saw at E3 you can expect QuakeCon to feature playable Quake IV multiplayer code. The only solid information released at the press event was that the multiplayer game will be similar in feel and form to Quake III. There are no bots at this stage, they've optimised the engine for speed and there won't be a cooperative mode. Don't you just hate this industry...? **NAG**

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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Developer

Epic Games

■ Publisher

Midway Games Ltd

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

■ Genre

FPS

■ Release Date

2006



"Wow. (Do we really need to say anything more?)"



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007

UNREAL TOURNAMENT [2004 VERSION] is certainly one of the more refined and technically challenging multiplayer action games around today. Besides the standard DM and CTF game modes you'll also find Assault and Onslaught, each bringing a different dimension to the onscreen mayhem by giving players specific tasks and encouraging team work on the battlefield. Now add to this the most exciting 3D engine technology currently in development, a handful of new weapons, vehicles and even more unique game modes, and you're sitting on what is potentially the next big thing in multiplayer action gaming on the PC.

We attended a presentation at E3 by Mike Capps, President of Epic Games where he showed us the next generation of Unreal Tournament. Before you get too excited, note the 2007 in the title – this game is still very far away, but has enough appeal to earn a special mention in our book.

The most important question we had for Mike was how much the game will change – it can take years to perfect your multiplayer game only to have all that time and effort eroded by a sudden change of physics, scale, movement or weapons. Thankfully the answer to this question was simple. They're taking the exact physics model and essentially strapping a better looking engine around it – so the game will appeal to old-school players by presenting the exact same feel of UT2K4, but with more options should you choose to explore them.

In terms of new features, there's a new game mode called Conquest that was described as somewhere between Assault and Onslaught – to clarify: imagine the size, feel and vehicles of Onslaught with the objective-based play of Assault. Add to this seamless technology where you can stitch multiple maps together and you're looking at epic conflicts across huge battlefields.

The physics engine is also improved, something that became clear when the Scorpion managed to carry two dead bodies on its blades for a short distance. An ejection feature also brings all new tactical [and fun] options to the game we already know and love.

The game is also promising new online features where players can, within the game, form clans, create Websites and find friends – the emphasis here is clearly on giving players all the fun they could want in one quick and easy to use interface. **NAG**



Switch Between One and Two Graphics Engines with Just Few Clicks on the Mouse

ASUS Motherboard, with AI Selector Utility and High-Speed Switch IC, Provides Convenient Selection of One or Two GPU Operation

The introduction of SLI (Scalable Link Interface) dual-PCI Express graphics card technology in 2004 brought significant improvement in graphics processing but also posed a big challenge for motherboard makers.

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While most motherboards still require users to physically select the two modes by unplugging and plugging selector cards, the ASUS A8N-SLI Premium motherboard incorporated AI (ASUS Intelligence) Selector, which adopted Pericom Semiconductor's PCI Express Switch IC (integrated circuit) instead of a selector card to provide convenient switching between SLI and non-SLI operation with just a few clicks on the mouse.

With the exclusive AI Selector, users of the A8N-SLI Premium, the enhanced version of the popular A8N-SLI Deluxe, no longer need to open the PC case and unplug and plug the selector card on the motherboard to change graphics card modes. The A8N-SLI Premium is the only motherboard

on the market equipped with programmable switch IC to eliminate the hassle of opening the PC case.

AI Selector allows users to select different graphics modes:

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With AI Selector technology, users can easily switch between two PCI Express x8 SLI mode and one PCI Express x16 mode to optimize performance for specific applications and 3D games.

"The A8N-SLI Premium with AI Selector represents motherboard engineering at its best. It provides the most convenient platform for either one or two graphics engines," said Joe Hsieh, Chief Editor of TechTrend Magazine. "We are pleased to announce the availability of this innovative solution for those who demand the very best in video performance."

Besides convenient SLI activation and deactivation, the A8N-SLI Premium comes with another exclusive feature, EZ Plug. When the system is in SLI mode, the supply of power for the graphics adaptors is crucial. The A8N-SLI Premium incorporated the patented EZ Plug, which provides dedicated support for the high power demands of graphics cards.

When the power source is positioned far away from the PCI Express slots, the long routing causes power degradation. This also creates unnecessary noise and interferes with the performance of other components along the way. The EZ Plug is located adjacent to the PCI Express slots to maintain voltage integrity during transmission, guaranteeing dependable supply of power, quiet operations and graphics card compatibility.



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VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC PS2 Xbox

Developer

Radical Entertainment

Publisher

Vivendi Universal Interactive

Supplier

MiDigital [011] 723 1967

Genre

Action

Release Date

2006



EXCLUSIVE

"Say hello to my
little friend!"



SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS

SAY HELLO TO ANOTHER movie license, this time from 1983. Like cousins marrying, the ill-fated computer game and movie union continues to produce deviations from the acceptable norm. Negatives aside however, it's starting to look more and more like developers are learning their lessons and putting the required effort in when dealing with this glummer end of the gaming market. Also considering the fact that we haven't had many blockbuster games based on a movie license, is starting to affect these franchises negatively in terms of marketability to the gaming community [games based on movies have a poor reputation]. So why then should Scarface be any different? Come inside and find out.

The restricted booth for this game set the scene perfectly – a heavy desk, a tray piled with fake cocaine [about a few hundred millions Dollars worth], brandy and a luxurious leather chair. The only thing missing were the hookers [but if you stuck your head outside onto the show floor for a second...]. For a start, the game begins where the movie ends. For the sake of the story, let's just say that Tony Montana wasn't killed at the mansion that night and instead managed to fight his way out, onto the street and into obscurity. Players now begin the game as a low level junkie doing deals on the street and selling cocaine for profit. The idea behind the game is to build

yourself a new drug empire and regain your former glory. Besides thumping innocents and selling drugs, there is a layer of management to this game and to this end you must also operate fronts [to launder money and so on] and you do this by taking on missions. The mission taken at the E3 presentation involved intercepting bank robbers, a car chase, a rooftop shootout and the eventual stealing of their stolen cash. Another interesting aspect of the game was the ability to travel across the ocean to a remote island. Here the idea is to do bigger deals with the drug bosses and smuggle the goods back to the mainland. The game looks and plays in a similar fashion to GTA, so you know what you're getting on the surface. For the sake of interest, one of the designers of this title used to live in South Africa. **NAG**

SNORT!

You can't take cocaine in the game – we fail to see the morality of being able to sell cocaine, but not take it. We think it would have added a unique dimension to the title if players had an addiction bar, and in a similar fashion to golf games the snorting of cocaine could be controlled – one click to start snorting and before the line hits the red sector you could click again to stop. The closer to the line you get, the better the high, increasing your performance for short intervals. Not taking would then have negative consequences... Oh, well.



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VITAL INFO

Platforms

Xbox PS2 PSP

Developer

High Voltage Software [PSP]

Genuine Games [Xbox | PS2]

Publisher

Vivendi Universal Interactive

Supplier

MiDigital (011) 723 1967

Genre

Action

Release Date

Q4 2005



EXCLUSIVE

*"In this game I
get to showcase
my wide range
of expression."*



50 CENT: BULLETPROOF

STOP BEFORE YOU TURN the page and give this one a quick look. Immediate reaction to this title from the more anal gamer is bound to be negative, but just consider this game as the beginning of something new and exciting. The crossover of delivery mechanisms happening here is truly unique and bodes well for the future of this medium.

And, if you're a fan of 50 Cent, this might be the best buy you'll ever make.

But first the game. The story is mentionable because it's written by Terry Winter, award winning executive producer of *The Sopranos*. You play 50 Cent who, with the help of G Unit [his crew], take on New York's crime families, uncover international conspiracies and shoot everything that moves. Pulling no punches, *Bulletproof* is presented as a third person action game where the emphasis is on violence and hard knocks – these are street thugs after all and not girl scouts selling cookies.

With this kind of license there's always the risk of cash-in, but as we understand it Mr. Cent is a big gamer and personally oversaw most of the development, also providing his likeness, voice, music and content. To put the icing on the cake, Eminem and Dr. Dre will also be making their interactive debuts as characters in the game. The play dynamic is fluid and includes a huge assortment of moves: from simple rolls and ducks to nasty finishing moves dependant on a combination of positioning and control. Based on the short demonstration at E3, *Bulletproof* is set to deliver nothing but hardcore action from the second you start.

As mentioned above, this isn't just a simple game and this quoted press release sums it up better than we can. "50 Cent: *Bulletproof* will feature new songs from 50 Cent recorded exclusively for the game, music from *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, *The Massacre* and 50 Cent and G Unit music videos. In addition, the game will offer a sound studio mode in which gamers can mix and match new original freestyles by 50 Cent with new beats straight from the G Unit camp."

As a pioneering interactive product that just so happens to include a rough and ready action game, 50 Cent: *Bulletproof* will be something to watch closely. Let's hope more artists take this kind of initiative without trying to cash in on the successes of interactive media. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

■ PC

■ Developer

LucasArts

■ Publisher

Petroglyph Games

■ Supplier

EA Africa (011) 516 8300

■ Genre

RTS

■ Release Date

Q3 2005



"E-whats? The fuzzy things? What are they gonna do, throw rocks at us? Ha!"



STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

"SHOULD WE DO IT?" asked the developer. Naturally everyone nodded and the Death Star blew up Tatooine. The group of journalists went quiet. "It was like a million voices crying out in unison..."

If you're a gamer and fan of Star Wars, then get excited about Empire at War you should. Some of you older gamers will probably approach this one with caution thanks to the dismal history of Star Wars and real-time

strategy games, but there is a new developer, strong with the force and goes by the name of Petroglyph Games [www.petroglyphgames.com]. Their team boasts an impressive collective experience ranging from Command & Conquer to Dune 2, and are gearing to make an impression with Empire at War – their first game. In terms

of story timeline, the game takes place between Episode III and Episode IV, after the Clone Wars and Destruction of the Jedi. A struggle for control of the galaxy ensues and this is where you fit in.

The demonstration battle we witnessed was impressive and everything looked and 'felt' right, from the lumbering AT-AT that was destroyed in spectacular fashion, to the appearance of Darth Vader (lightsabre and all), who force lifted and crushed a Rebel tank. As the two forces struggled across the surface of Tatooine, a squadron of TIE Bombers zeroed in on the Rebel defences. With the destruction of the shield generators, the battle was over and the last remaining Rebel forces retreated into space where an equally impressive Star Destroyers versus Alliance cruisers was taking place, complete with dozens of TIE Fighters and X-Wings all fighting for supremacy. It all ended with the Death Star coming into firing range of Tatooine [see above].

Where Empire at War differs from most RTS titles is the expansive campaign model – players will engage in a war against the forces of evil and this war will feature numerous battles. How players decide to use their resources will determine the eventual outcome of the overall struggle. An example of this play dynamic was demonstrated where Rebel forces in retreat were later used in a different battle on a different planet. But that's not all, this is just a small sampling of the entire experience and the developers are aiming to bring something fresh and new to the RTS battlefield. If successful, then Empire at War could be the game we've all been waiting for. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms



■ Developer

Criterion

■ Publisher

Electronic Arts

■ Supplier

EA Africa (011) 516 8300

■ Genre

FPS

■ Release Date

TBA



EXCLUSIVE

Boom! Yeah!
Shrapnel!
Ouch!

BLACK

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE guns. Criterion's penchant for excessive amounts of detail and debris is well known, especially after the exquisite racing title *Burnout 3*. Putting all their creative energy and focus into a new genre, *Black* is the end result of a wonderful merging of classic action and Criterion's enjoyment of Hollywood action movie gunfights.

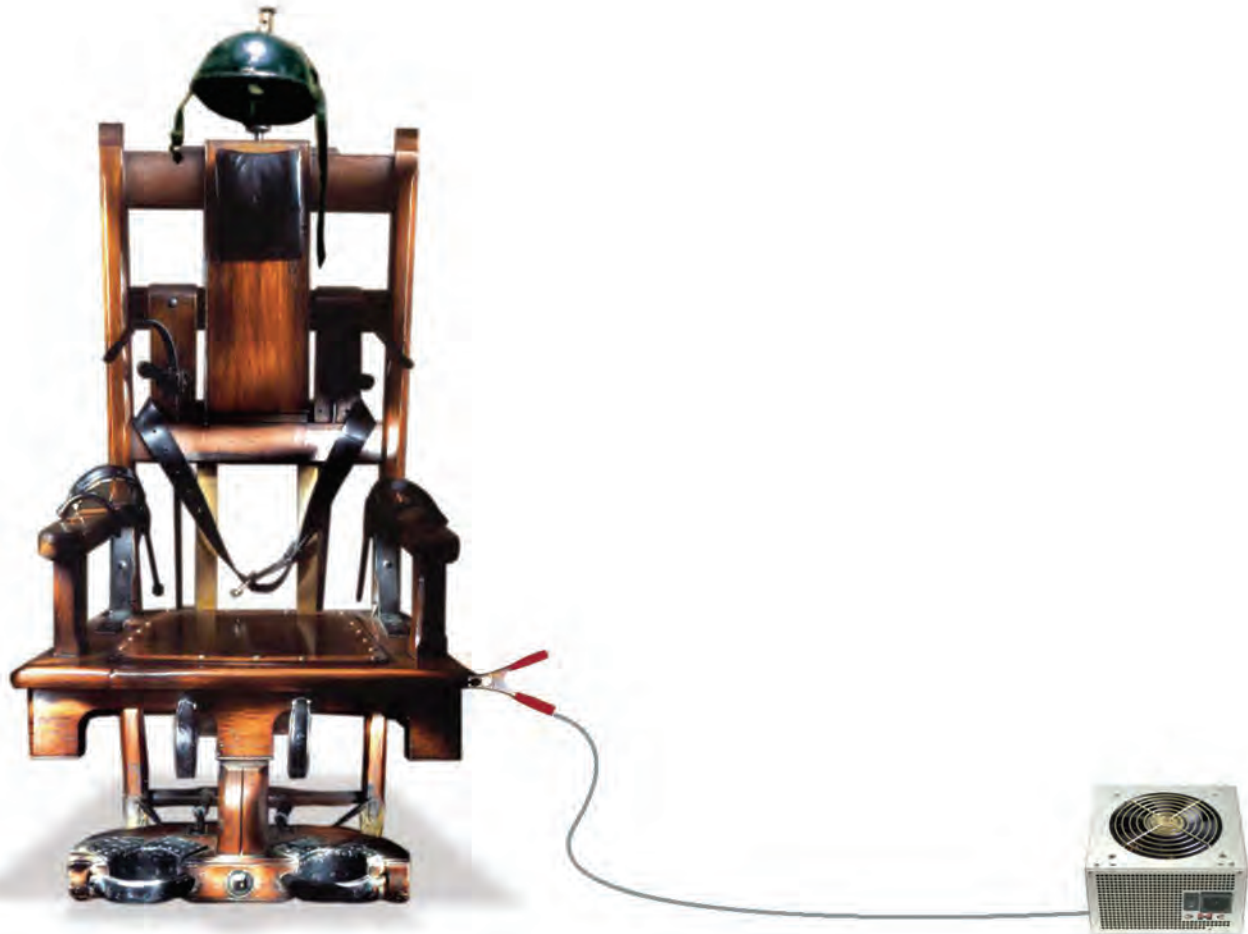
But as mentioned, it's all about the guns. With the simple logic that in a First Person Shooter the gun represents the character, Criterion put amiable detail into both the visual and auditory aspects of the guns. In short, they look good and sound incredible. Once in the thick of it, *Black*'s strength becomes very obvious. You have never seen a fire fight like this. Clouds of dust, a rain of debris and spectacular explosions accompany every major gunfight. Throwing a grenade into an open window (where a hapless sniper is taking pot-shots at you) will not only kill the errant sniper, but cause the entire building to explode spectacularly - floor by floor. The environment reacts exactly how it would in a movie. Shooting a large sign above a door will cause it to slam into enemies below; bullet-

riddled cars will explode into shrapnel while enemy fire will chip into pillars and walls, showering you with flecks of cement.

The single level shown to us at E3 was impressive both visually and in terms of how reactive the environment was to the ministrations of crossfire. Criterion was quick to mention that visually the game was only 60% complete - they expect to push the PS2 even further by the time the game is finalised. **NAG**

***You take their
 floor away, it
 takes your breath
 away***





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VITAL INFO

Platforms



Developer

EA Games

Publisher

Electronic Arts

Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

Genre

Action

Release Date

2006



EXCLUSIVE



THE GODFATHER

THERE IS LITTLE TO be said about The Godfather here, that hasn't already been said in the last issue's preview of the game. However, we were fortunate to get a little personal hands-on time with the Corleone family at E3, giving the game (which is only 30% complete) a spin.

As we know, the story is about family, respect and loyalty. The game however, is about roughing people up, returning favours and trying to survive in a 1945 to 1955 New York. The most interesting aspect of The Godfather is how you interact with people. Using what the developers like to call 'The Black Hand', your controller becomes an extension of your own physical self. More simply put, you have a lot more control over situations than usual. After grabbing a hapless person, you can either lay into them with punches or you can fake your punches to intimidate them. The environment itself can also play a fun role in your interrogations. Moving up against a wall will have your character slam your victim against it, where you can continue your violent (or implied violent) ministrations. Ledges, walls, cars and other fun locations are all great intimidation hotspots - perfect for putting the fear of The Family into someone.

All your actions have consequence, of course. If you're a little too violent, people will simply run away from you when they see you strutting their way in the street. If you're too soft, people will walk all over you. Even the usually stoic dialogue sections have been given slightly more attention than usual. If you are asked a question,



you only have a certain amount of time to pick an answer before the other person becomes annoyed at your silence. The angrier someone is at you, the more impatient they'll be for your response - so you'll have to think fast.

Unfortunately there wasn't much else to do in the version of The Godfather we played, other than roughing up some innocents and perhaps shooting some bad guys. Regardless, the promise of a fresh, deep mob experience is there, rising through the ranks and eventually becoming head of the house. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

■ PC

■ Developer

Lionhead Studios

■ Publisher

Electronic Arts

■ Supplier

EA Africa (011) 516 8300

■ Genre

FPS

■ Release Date

Q4 2005



EXCLUSIVE

BLACK & WHITE 2



"Don't worry men! It's just a model using stop motion and camera tricks, I'm sure of it!"



ALL DIGNITY AND UNBIASED 'hypocritical' journalistic oaths aside, we have to come clean and admit that we're dyed-in-the-cloth fans of anything Peter Molyneux puts together. In fact, the Editor still hasn't washed his hand after meeting the master creator at a private viewing of Black & White 2 at E3 [he thinks the greatness will rub off somehow – here's hoping]. But enough with the hyping and other nonsense and onto the game at hand.

A brief summary of the game goes like this: you're a god with some followers [gods need followers to maintain and gain power]; you also have a creature [your avatar in the real world]; this creature does your bidding, be it stomping villagers or gathering trees for firewood for the villagers. There are other gods and you must all play it out for control of various islands. This is a gross simplification of the game, but rest assured, combined with state of the art graphics, an artificial intelligence system like no other, village management, waging war, casting spells or just planting flowers, Black & White 2 is going to steal away weeks of your life. More importantly, the creators of this sequel have taken careful note of everything said about the original game [good and bad] and have

implemented all the necessary improvements and refinements in the sequel. Besides now being able to go to war with your people and creature, you can summon natural disasters such as volcanoes and lay siege to opposing towns.

One of the more useful improvements to the game is the GUI [graphical user interface] or in this case a disembodied hand [the hand of god]. Move the hand, or your hand, over a building and an information bubble will appear. Hold it there for longer and more detailed information becomes available – this allows you to decide how much or how little information you want at any time. Other improvements involve the creating of your town, and the placement of roads, houses, etc., are as easy as dragging your mouse along the path that you want the road to follow. Placement of houses is also intuitive and features context sensitive placement. Also new to the game are tribute points – you'll earn these by playing the game well [exploring the landscape, using your creature in creative ways and completing missions]. These points can then be used to buy buildings, spells and even new weapons for your army. We can't wait. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms



■ Developer

Cyan

■ Publisher

Ubisoft

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

Adventure

■ Release Date

Q4 2005



EXCLUSIVE

*If I were an
alien-like race,
I'd also put my
teleporter near
the ocean*



MYST V: END OF AGES

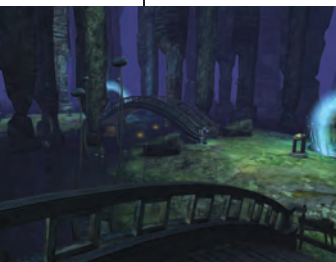
TWELVE YEARS AGO, MYST silently defined the puzzle/adventure genre with slick visuals for its time and a control scheme that anyone could understand. We caught up with Rand Miller (who formed Cyan with his brother Robyn Miller) at E3 and talked about the upcoming end of the Myst saga - Myst V: End of Ages.

The most surprising aspect of Myst V is the fact that it's completely real-time 3D this time around (not unlike realMyst, but nothing like Uru). Fans were happy to see the visual quality of Myst 4 and the return of live-motion actors, so the transition to 3D seemed to be an odd move. After receiving a demonstration of Myst V, it was easy to see why this move was made. Myst V is every bit as beautiful as its pre-rendered predecessors, but can now be completely explored from every conceivable angle. Rand himself seemed very pleased with the visual fidelity of the game, but quickly quelled any fears that this new level of freedom would alienate fans of the more direct 'click' approach from the previous games. Players can either use traditional first person controls to explore, or switch to 'Classic' mode, where the camera is on a set track and controlled by clicking on hotspots, exactly like the previous games. Myst V will never require gamers to use the first person controls, they are there solely for those who wish to explore their surroundings in detail.

The demonstration at E3 covered the basics. There will be around six Ages to explore (with one looking very

familiar) and the inclusion of an interesting new tool, namely the 'Tablet', keeps things fresh. Drawing certain patterns on the tablet causes events in the environment, but the tablet itself can be a hindrance as you cannot climb ladders while holding it, for example. While the characters you interact with in the world are 3D models, their faces are actually recorded footage of the voice-actors' faces. This lends the characters a certain eerie authenticity, every subtle facial nuance visible as they speak - something facial geometry still has a hard time capturing.

There is no doubt that Myst V is a fine addition to the series, as well as a fitting epitaph to the Myst legacy. **NAG**



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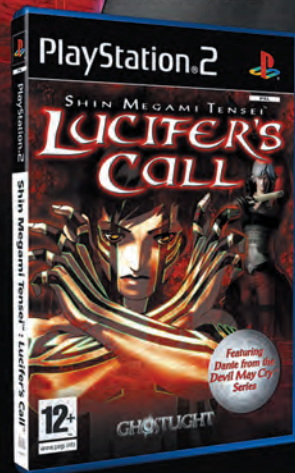


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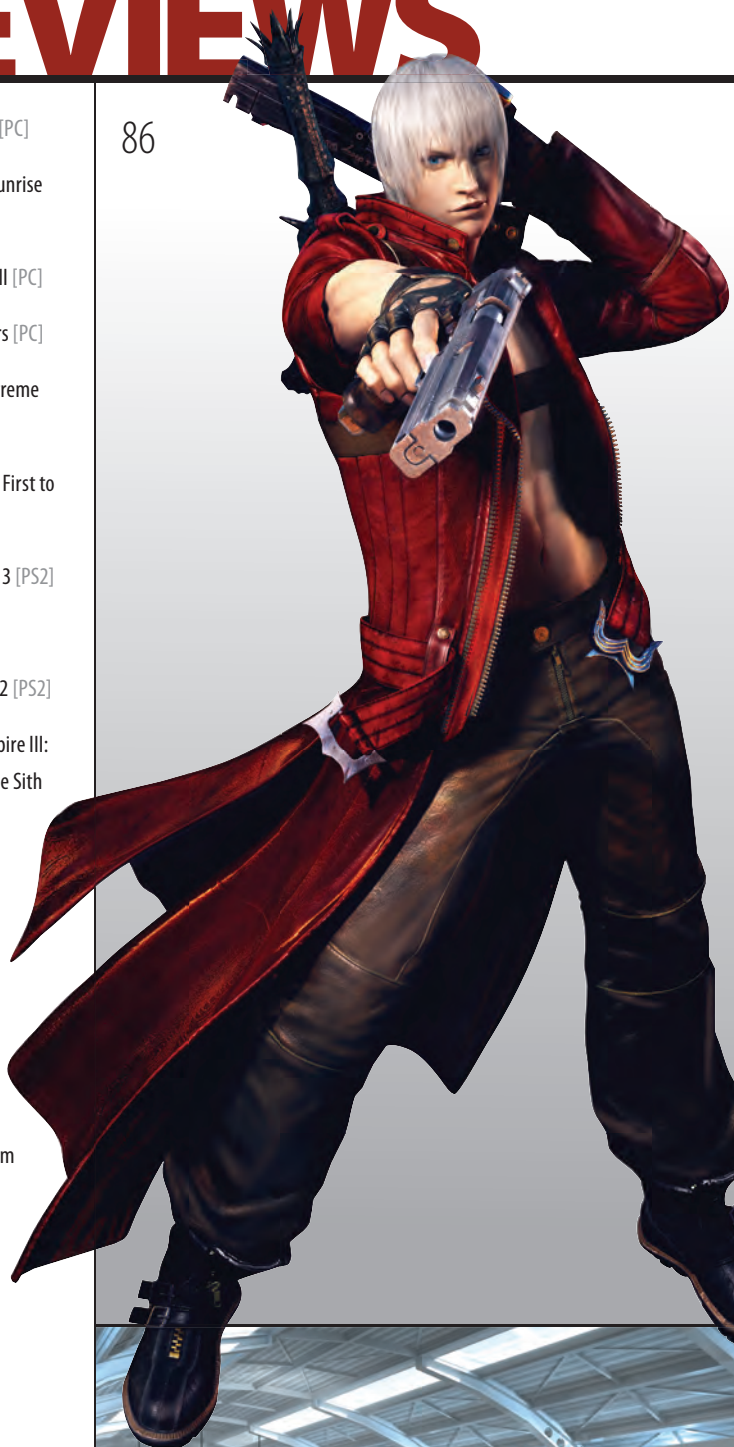
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Editor's Choice

Once in a while, a game comes along that displays certain qualities which our editor likes. Pretty colours and loud noises help...



Platform

Platforms are described using icons rather than just plain old words. For those of you who don't know (shame on you) they are, left to right, top to bottom: PC, PS2, GameCube, Xbox, PSP, Game Boy Advance, and DS.



Scoring

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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms



■ Suggested Retail Price

R280

■ Developer

Firefly Studios

■ Publisher

2K Games

■ Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

RTS/Management

■ Age Restriction

12+

■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 1.4GHz

256MB RAM

12x CD-ROM

32MB Video Card

2.5GB HDD



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heads**

STRONGHOLD 2

STRONGHOLD 2 TRANSPORTS THE player to feudal medieval Europe. It is quite a long journey, and so takes quite some time – I am referring to the game's loading time. In fact, right off the bat and before I forget, allow me to point out that the minimum requirements are listed exactly as they appear on the game's packaging, but for the game to run acceptably you'll need to exceed the listed specifications by quite a margin! The game is very resource hungry, particularly in the memory department.

Stronghold 2 explores a theme that has been visited by

several medieval-themed games in the past. The player is charged with the task of fielding an army, but unlike most real-time strategy games, it requires the player to provide a fairly believable underlying economy. The foundation is formed by civilians who provide the fundamental infrastructure services that support the entire war effort. Often, games of this type tend to be very slow-playing, but the creators of Stronghold 2 have opted to allow buildings to be built instantaneously, and this keeps the pace lively while maintaining economic intricacy and depth. Of course, as players familiar with the original Stronghold will realise, another major emphasis of this game is the building of strong, effective castles that are able to withstand heavy sieges, and also to crack the defences of such with a besieging force.

The game provides a number of varied game modes, divided into two major categories: The Path of Peace and The Path of War. The former focuses on economic goals, while the latter places larger demands on the player, as economic goals must still be achieved in order to succeed on the battlefield. Most notably, The Path of Peace offers a peaceful campaign and a free build mode – the latter being a sandbox mode that leaves the player unfettered by the need to accomplish specific goals, and with a full spectrum of technologies available. The Path of War features the military campaign, as well as Kingmaker mode, which is a series of challenges against increasingly difficult AI opponents, and the custom mode that allows playing custom scenarios. We were impressed to find that the game's timeline actually



consists of stories! In fact, it is the military one that is the most interesting, being full of twists and turns, intrigues and betrayals, shifting alliances and the like. Well, done, Firefly Studios! Not so well done in terms of their usage of the English language – besides some downright poor spelling and grammar, we were occasionally amused to hear a fancy word or expression being used in a completely incorrect context! Good for laughs, we suppose.

New to this version of Stronghold is an impressive 3D engine. Textures are believable by having been ‘dirtied up’ somewhat. A neat feature is that hovering the mouse cursor over a building, that contains something of relevance, will cut away parts of or all of the roof or walls, allowing the player to look inside without changing the camera aspect. The one disappointment for us, from a graphical point-of-view - if you will - is the trees: these sway in the breeze, but look rather dated. But there are so many of them, that this is excusable, particularly given the game’s system resource appetite. There is nothing particularly remarkable about the sound – it works, is appropriate, and perfectly adequate.

Something worthy of mention is the game’s level of challenge. The campaigns start off fairly easy, giving the player the opportunity to get to grips with the game [there is a comprehensive tutorial, but this never compares to ‘live ammo’ conditions]. The learning curve quickly becomes very difficult thereafter. We found this most satisfying, even despite some superficial frustration as the latter only adds to the sense of accomplishment once the troublesome level is finally ‘licked’! So by no means a lightweight game, and yet we see it appealing to a fairly broad audience of gamers. Both real-time strategy enthusiasts and fans of medieval lore should find this one most engaging. Also, given the length of the average mission (in single-player campaigns) players will likely find they are getting value for their money in terms of playing time. **NAG**



TOP: Armed peasants ravage exposed buildings outside the keep



LEFT: Wolves!!!



BOTTOM: The map editor – what you see is what you get!

A COMPLEX RESOURCE MODEL

In many respects, Stronghold 2's resource model is reminiscent of games such as Knights and Merchants and the Settlers series. The first tier of resources includes the likes of lumber, stone and single-process foodstuffs, as well as a couple of specialised raw materials that can be refined into other goods. The general population consumes four basic types of food: game meat, apples, cheese and bread. The first three are obtained in one step each, while to make bread one must grow wheat, which is then ground to flour and finally baked into bread. Each food type production takes its own amount of time to get underway, and a variety of food types is desirable. Players must, of course, also gain an

income of gold, which is obtained primarily by means of taxation, as well as by the sale of surplus goods. Overall, however, despite the respectable number of available resources and goods, refinement chains have been kept short, so the production of bread, for instance, is more or less as involved a process as one will encounter. The only exception to this is honour. This is actually a resource, which accrues by various actions being performed or conditions being met. It is wise to set up continuous honour generation conditions, which require the ongoing supply of varying goods. Training troops requires the appropriate weapons (which are made from raw materials), gold and, sometimes, honour.

A splendiferous experience, with intelligence to match

90

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms



■ Suggested Retail Price

R 299

■ Developer

Nadeo

■ Publisher

Digital Jesters

■ Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

■ Genre

Racing/Puzzle

■ Age Restriction

3+

■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 500MHz

128MB RAM

4 x CD-ROM

16MB Video Card

900MB HDD



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TRACKMANIA SUNRISE

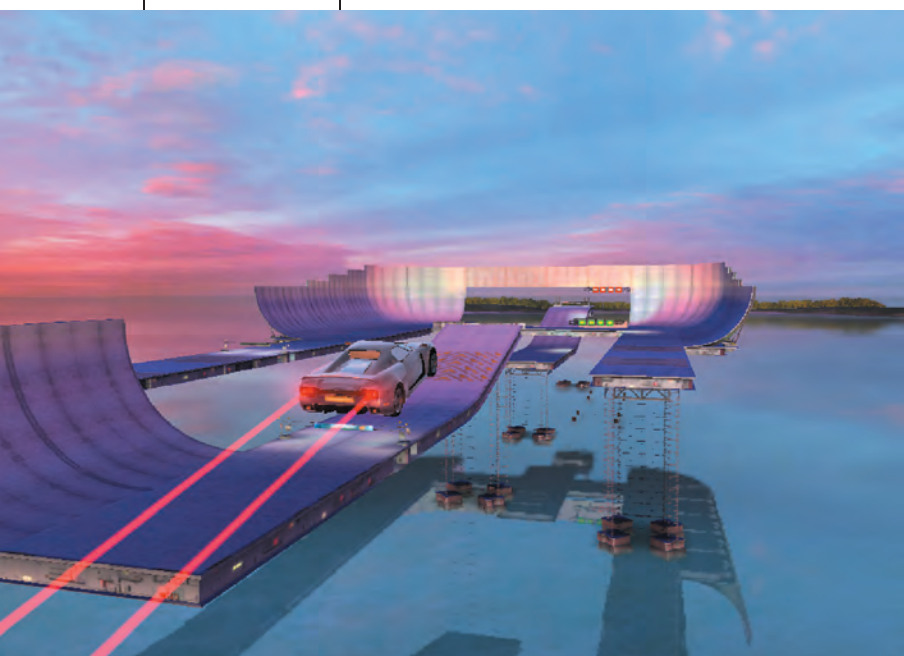
THERE IS NOTHING MORE wondrous than seeing an indie (small time, self-funded, self-published) game development company making headway in this clone-oversaturated big-publisher house dominated game market we have. French development house Nadeo brought a little light to the gaming world with their quirky puzzle-racing game

Trackmania. Now, the sun is rising with their latest release of this series and what a glorious sunrise it is.

Trackmania Sunrise is not a racing game. Most people will quickly notice that cars won't collide with each other (not in any of the single player or multiplayer modes), instead passing right through in an ethereal manner. This will indubitably annoy the more physical gamers who enjoy using their cars as melee weapons, but Nadeo had a vision in mind. Crashing into other cars wasn't it. Instead, the Trackmania Sunrise experience is more about beating specific track times, building tracks, doing insane (and often highly impossible) jumps and generally travelling at high speed.

Nadeo also had a rather grandiose vision in mind for the graphical fidelity of Trackmania Sunrise. Instead of going into long descriptions, the gist of it is this: utterly stunning, visually engrossing and just overly beautiful. On full detail, Trackmania Sunrise requires a rather powerful machine, but is most definitely worth it, giving you the full impression that you're driving at 400km/h.

As mentioned, the core idea behind Trackmania Sunrise is speed. This idea is then utilised in four different modes: Race, Platform, Puzzle and Crazy. Each of the modes plays



out in one of three different environments, each with its own car and driving style. The Island environment is your high-speed area with its accompanying car being responsive enough to deal with the high octane situation. The Coast environment is for the more realistic experience, its Mediterranean setting perfect for the roadster you drive there. Lastly, the Bay tracks make use of a bouncy 4X4 with more emphasis on stunting your way through the detailed urban areas.

Each mode is almost an entire game on its own. The most traditional of the four modes is the Race - requiring you to beat a certain time on a course; achieving either bronze, silver or gold medals depending on your time. Get enough gold medals in a section, and you can progress to the next section which houses a new set of courses. The Platform mode is slightly more unconventional, requiring you to complete a course involving lots of jumps, sharp turns and various death-defying leaps. To progress, you have to complete the course without falling off into the ocean too many times. Keeping things even more interesting is the Crazy mode, an elimination challenge where you race against 12 opponents and try to beat them to the finish line. Once you've crossed the finish line, the slowest car is removed and you race again until you've managed to eliminate all the other cars. It's a lot more difficult than it sounds.

Last but not least is the Puzzle mode, which was actually the entire premise behind the original Trackmania game and is still as appealing now as it was back then. In the Puzzle mode you have to complete a course in a certain amount of time, but there's one major hitch. The course isn't complete. Using the built-in editor, you have to use the limited amount of level-blocks provided and complete the course before racing on it. Often there are several routes to the finish line, but finding the optimal route that makes the best use of the course's blocks is the real challenge.

Not forgetting that often playing with friends is more fun than playing by yourself [*this depends on what you're doing, Ed*], Trackmania Sunrise has a full multiplayer component. Everything from hot-seat on a single computer, right through to local network and Internet play is supported. More impressively, everything you create in the cacophony of editors provided within the game can be shared with other players online via an integrated peer-to-peer network.

Trackmania Sunrise allows you to build your own tracks and challenges for any of the modes, as well as allowing you to edit 'ghost' files (for placing competitors on the tracks).



You can even edit your saved replays, adding in effects, text, camera changes and anything else you can imagine. Afterwards, you can save the replay and share it with friends or export it to a video. Lastly, you can edit the appearance of your car in the skins editor, painting your entire car from scratch and even placing important custom-made decals on your car however you desire. The level of customisation in Trackmania Sunrise is nothing short of astounding.

Aside from a very high difficulty curve (some of the later levels require slightly insane amounts of control and patience) and high system requirements, Trackmania Sunrise is almost entirely without flaw and yields a wonderful high-speed experience for those who want it. **NAG**

Above: The track editor is about as fully-featured as you can get.

Below: You can make your car as beautiful or as ugly as you want.



A slow strategy game that Age of Empires fans will love.

62

VITAL INFO

Platforms



Suggested Retail Price

R 299

Developer

mad doc software

Publisher

Sierra

Supplier

MIDigital [011] 723 1967

Genre

RTS

Age Restriction

12+

Minimum Specs

Pentium 1.5GHz

256MB RAM

4x CD-ROM

64MB Video Card

1.5GB HDD



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THE WAR PLANNER

A great innovation, particularly for team multiplayer games, is the inclusion of this tool. It provides a full screen map whereon the player may draw arrows, designate target areas, highlight areas and attach text labels. This can then be sent to allies, and will also appear on their mini-maps. Why no one has come up with something like this ages ago is beyond us!



EMPIRE EARTH II

EMPIRE EARTH FIRST SURFACED a few years ago, and was a truly groundbreaking title at the time. It featured a game dynamic very much inspired by the Age of Empires games, yet introduced 3D graphics and a broader span of epochs. The new Empire Earth game follows in its footsteps, although it may be argued that it does so too well.

As is customary with modern games, the game's menu interface is backed by beautiful animated backdrops.

Options for singleplayer and multiplayer modes are offered, including a tutorial, which is quite extensive and adequate for both total novices and for those who are familiar with the game genre. The tutorial explains all the standard features, as well as detailing the new ones, of which there are a couple.

As long as the player is in the game, whether it is in the menu system, in the map editor or in

a battle, a musical score plays. This is generally of a high quality, though its 'anthemic' nature does get somewhat tiresome after a while. The graphical nature of the game, obviously, only becomes apparent once one dives into one of the numerous game types. Although the units are fairly well modelled and animated, everything else looks rather dated. The terrain seems as if it could have been taken directly from one of the Age of Empires games and rendered at a higher resolution (the water is very pretty, however). The buildings are awfully rectilinear and boxy, and their colours not very realistic. The buildings from older epochs, such as fortresses, suffer less from this, and it generally looks like they received more attention and effort than the more modern structures, such as airports. With all the detail levels set to maximum, one cannot help but wonder what exactly has been enabled, and how appalling it would look at lower detail levels. However, on the up-side, this means that this title has rather modest





system requirements, and can be expected to run well on even a relatively old system.

Despite the archaic graphics, the game does redeem itself in how it plays. It bears mentioning that this game has a pace akin to that of the Age of Empires games, so don't expect fast and furious action. However, this doesn't mean that battles don't get intense! A typical engagement will feature tens of units on each side, and the control interface can be adjusted to take this into account. Speaking of the control interface – the game looks best in its highest resolution (needless to say), but the mouse action does not compensate for the higher number of smaller pixels, so it becomes exceptionally sluggish and 'swimmy'. Unfortunately, there is no independent mouse sensitivity control, which would solve this problem outright. Unlike Age of Empires

games (forgive us, but the constant comparisons are, in fact, unavoidable, as calling this game

an "Age clone" would not be unfair!) Empire Earth's campaign storylines are not rooted totally in historical fact. What the developers have done here is to explore possible alternate timelines by starting off in a historical manner, then digressing to a 'what if' scenario. For example: the Aztec campaign allows the player to turn back the Conquistador invasion and to create a thriving Aztec culture that survives into the present day.

The technology tree also has an element that is new to this genre. As before, it requires the successful researching of various technologies in order to progress through the epochs. However, in Empire Earth II you are not allowed to research everything. Once you have progressed to the next age, any items that were not researched previously become inaccessible. This is actually a strength of this game, as it requires players to make strategic decisions. Some technologies will be unattainable – choose which ones they will be, and hope your selections are wise!

Units interact as in any decent strategy game. Each unit type is strong against another unit type, and weak against others. The trick is to learn these relationships so that one always counters with the appropriate unit type. Of course, ultimately the best armies are the well rounded ones that incorporate all the various unit types.

The same principle applies to naval combat, but the relationships change through the epochs, so players will need to watch this aspect carefully.

This game promises a deep multiplayer experience, particularly in light of the war planner tool. Expect games to last quite some time, so this one is for LAN gamers who enjoy long, drawn-out games. **NAG**

MANAGING THE ECONOMY

This game boasts an innovative way to manage resource collection. Firstly, it is possible to allocate idle workforce to (or de-allocate them from) the gathering of various resources by clicking (or right-clicking) on the respective resource in the user interface. Furthermore, the same approach is available from this screen, which presents the player with a full screen map of the playing area, including resource locations. It is also possible to build some resource buildings directly on this map.



Tongue in cheek and simplistic, but excellent

88

VITAL INFO

Platforms



Suggested Retail Price

R 349

Developer

Travellers Tales

Publisher

Eidos

Supplier

(PS2) Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

(PC) Megarom [011] 234 2680

Genre

Third Person Action

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Players: 1-2

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**Star Wars as
Lego? Excellent!**

LEGO STAR WARS

STAR WARS PLATFORM GAMES suck. To date there have been exceptions to the rule that Star Wars games are below par knock-off games, such as the Dark Forces series and anything involving huge amounts of shooting, but platform titles haven't been graced with this yet. Ironically, it took the Lego characters to come to its rescue.

Don't ask why, perhaps it's because it's Lego, but Lego Star Wars has a real charm to it. Presenting the first three episodes, the developers managed to incorporate Lego's popular Star Wars toy range into it. Essentially it means that almost everything in the game is built out of Lego. It also means that there is no dialogue - a quirky touch that works brilliantly. It's cute and funny, plus it saves us the bother of watching long complicated scenes involving politics and love - stuff we don't really care about when there are lightsabres to be used.

The game dynamic is also extremely simple. Each level involves two key characters running around the level, killing opponents, collecting gems and finding secrets. The Jedi can do double jumps and use the Force

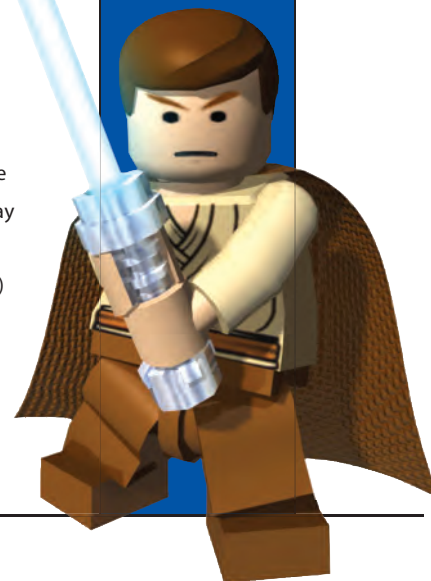
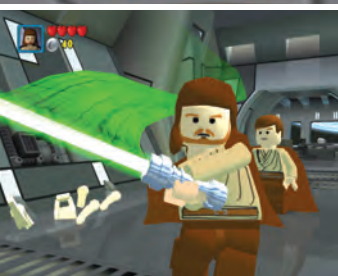
powers, while other characters feature blasters and the ability to use ropes to get to higher platforms. Some are also unique in their ability: Jar-Jar has a very high leap while Yoda in combat resembles doing advanced Russian gymnastics on spring-loaded shoes. The Force has been assigned one specific function: Force Do Stuff. When a Jedi reaches an object that can be manipulated, it glows and all you need to do is hold in your Force button.

That's it - dead simple. Lives are infinite, since as a penalty you lose gems if you die, and finishing the game is a matter of a few hours. But the replay ability comes in with the co-op mode (which works in any stage of the game) and the tons of stuff you can unlock. In short, it's simple fun with the Force and lightsabres, backed by that immortal score of Star Wars music. **NAG**

LEGO STAR WARS [PC] 75

The PC incarnation of this game would be as great as the PS2 version. It has all the hallmarks, including drop-in co-op play on one machine or via a LAN. Graphically it looks a lot better, mainly thanks to antialiasing. But a gamepad with analogue controls would be a wise investment, since the clunky keyboard interface is a bit too thuggish for comfort - especially with more elaborate characters like Yoda. It's still a fun title and if you don't have a PlayStation 2, it's worth getting for the PC.

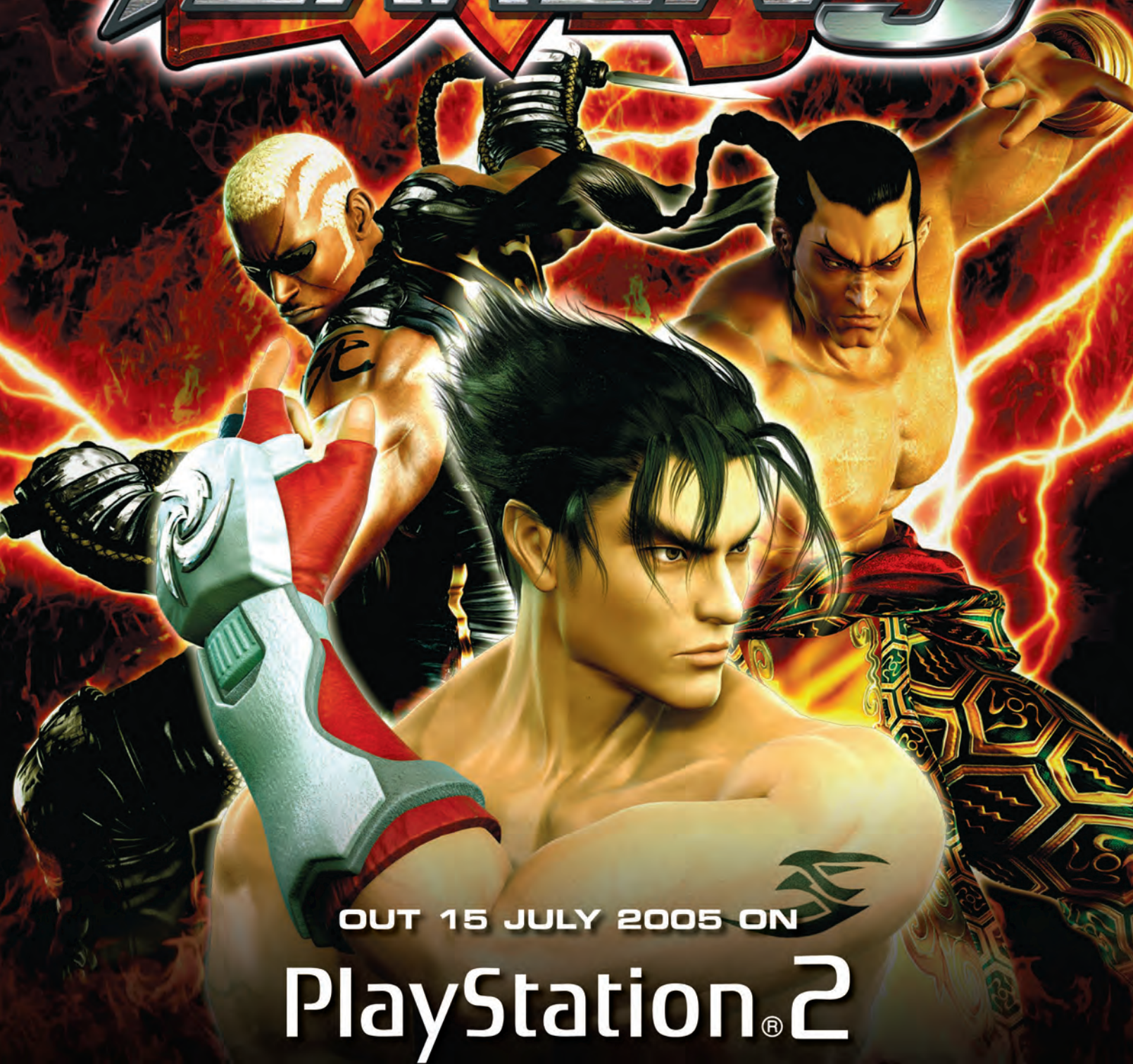
Solid as the console version, but the controls are too rigid





TM

TEKKEN 5



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Classic Delta Force action, but still pretty dated

75

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms



■ Suggested Retail Price

R187

■ Developer

Novalogic

■ Publisher

Novalogic

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

FPS

■ Age Restriction

16+

■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 1.2GHz

512MB RAM

16x CD-ROM

32MB Video Card

2GB HDD



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VIDEO REVIEW



*It's back with
bigger maps,
dumber
targets, better
graphics and
dirt bikes-and it
still rocks*



THE DELTA FORCE SERIES pioneered large outdoor areas. Back in the days before accelerators, it did this feat with a Voxal engine, which managed to dry hump anything except the most powerful of machines. Since then the series has evolved slightly, culminating in two points: the character-driven missions from Land Warrior and the more linear, but excellent Black Hawk Down (the online incarnation Joint Operations needs a mention as well). Black Hawk Down was great, but it was more structured and lost most of Delta Force's freedom of movement. When you are presented with a large map and a powerful rifle, the last thing you want to do is take convoy treks through busy towns. With Xtreme it's back to basics.

In a nutshell, Delta Force Xtreme is the tried-and-tested gameplay from Delta Force 1 and 2, but with the gameplay and graphical enhancements we saw in Black Hawk Down and Joint Ops. So it's prettier, far lusher and now features vehicles. But it's still a large map with lots of hills and several mission objectives. The default tactic in Delta Force has always been to find a good vantage point, take out what you can see with your rifle and then move in to clean up the place. Xtreme still follows that ethos to the letter. There are other squads on the map, but their actions are entirely determined by where you are and what stage of the mission you have completed.

Sometimes they don't do anything at all. Thankfully, the bad guys – who for some reason all look the same no matter which of the three geographically distinct campaigns you take – are really dumb and all they have to their advantage is a super-human knowledge of knowing exactly where you are when they are alerted of your presence. The AI can mob you from time to time, but no advanced tactics are required.

If you want some old-school Delta Force action, Xtreme is perfect. It still annoys us that the graphics and interactivity haven't taken a huge leap – indoor areas are still as dull as drying paint – and the physics engine is pretty lacklustre, but it's easy to ignore these once you get into the swing of things. All you need is a hill, an automatic with a scope and some time to kill. **NAG**



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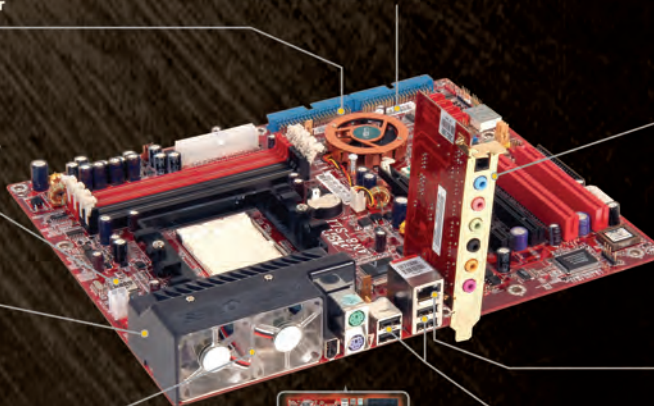


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A sub-par affair attempting to capitalise on the latest trend in first-person shooters

60

VITAL INFO

Platforms



Suggested Retail Price

R299

Developer

Destineer Studios

Publisher

2K games

Supplier

Megarom [011] 234 2680

Genre

FPS

Age Restriction

16+

Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 1.3GHz

256MB RAM

CD ROM

32MB Video Card

2.8GB HDD



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SQUAD-BASED SHOOTERS ARE THIS year's lens flair. And with the really decent ones out there, you're bound to get a few that are really just hitching a ride on the bandwagon. Close Combat: First to Fight is one of those extraordinarily non-entertaining, soulless attempts to capitalise on the current trend.

Don't get me wrong – there's nothing especially bad about Close Combat. It is just totally uninspiring and unimaginative, and its hook, that it's been designed in co-operation with US Marines fresh from the battlefields of Iraq, just simply isn't enough to make it stand out from the crowd.

In Close Combat, the emphasis is on RTFA (Ready Team Fire Assist), the system which determines how US Marines navigate urban environments. Your team consists of a rifleman, a SAW machine gunner and an assistant gunner, who has the unenviable job of carrying spare

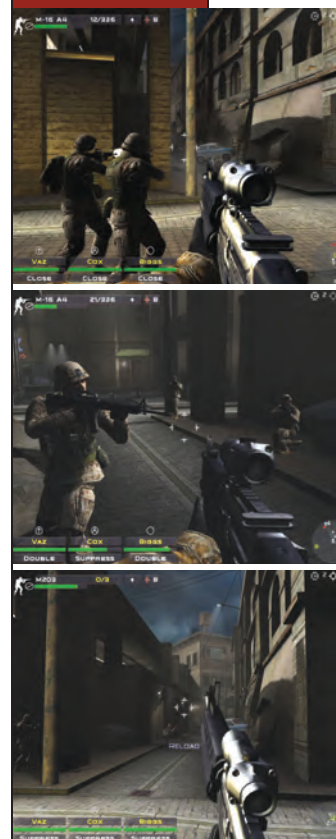
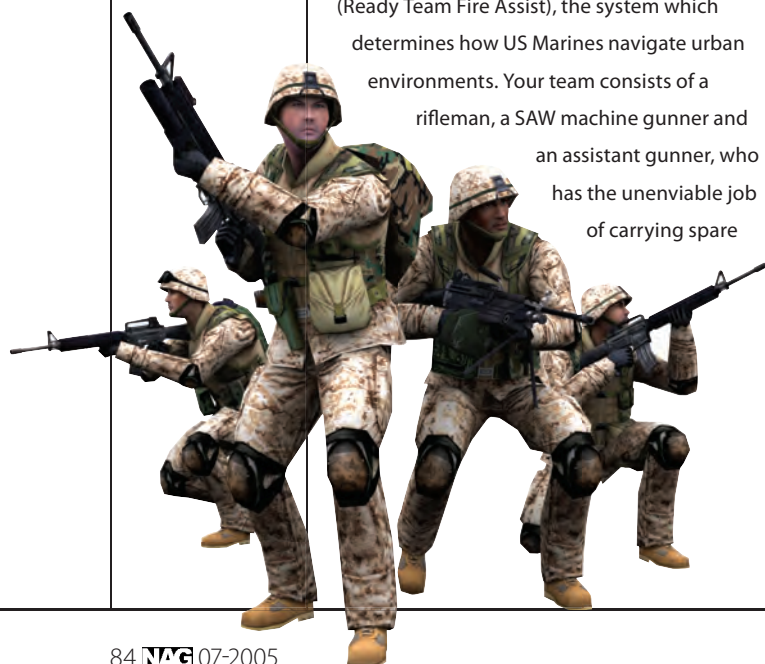
ammunition for the SAW machinegun. As you move, your team moves with you, making sure all the angles are covered. You can also issue the standard assortment of commands to your team, including the ever-useful and entertaining 'Frag Takedown', where anything on the other side of a door is turned into a rather unpleasant mess in a synchronised affair that involves door breaching and frag grenade tossing.

Sounds exciting, but in reality, Close Combat is a rather bland affair. The graphics certainly try to capture the essence of urban warfare, with rich textures and grand architecture, but on anything less than the absolute cutting-edge machine, you'll experience choppy gameplay and at times, complete freezes. It's an unjustifiable resource hog, and clearly the designers slacked off in streamlining the game's engine.

Apparently, US Marines use Close Combat: First to Fight as a training tool, which would go some way to explaining American casualties in the Gulf war. Ooh, harsh, I know, but when the enemies run past you, around you and occasionally through you in their dim-witted attempt to follow a predetermined script, you can't help but wonder. For a game that promises so much in the AI department, it falls woefully short. Kind of indicative of the rest of the game, really. **NAG**

IT'S ALL ABOUT TEAMWORK

RTFA is more than about your squad; it's all about the angles, roles and function of your team. For example: the SAW gunner's responsibility is to provide cover fire while the team moves across open terrain, while the assistant gunner covers the team's rear at all times. Stairwells, alleys, streets and entryways are all best tackled when every member in the fire team covers their angle, offering the best protection for the squad.





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Heavy action meets ridiculous style. This series has never been better.

90

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 370

Developer

Capcom

Publisher

Capcom

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

Players: 1

Memory: 250k

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DEVIL MAY CRY 3

ARE YOU READY TO rock?! Of course you are. No gamer in his right mind would be reading this review out of casual interest and not know anything about Devil May Cry. In fact, let's keep it at that. This series rocks and you have to play it because, frankly, there isn't a damn thing like it out there today.

Then again, if everyone knew about Devil May Cry, then we wouldn't need to do this review. Hell, it would be the top selling game of all time! So perhaps there is a chance that some of you reading this probably have no idea what we're going on about here.

No problem. We live to spread the goodness of games to everyone.

That said; it's not too surprising if Devil May Cry hasn't crossed your path yet. Firstly, the series has always been tied exclusively to the PlayStation 2 (with Devil May Cry 4 already tentatively announced for the PS3). Secondly, though for reasons beyond us, people always need to 'discover' Devil May Cry.

Thirdly, the second game was a bit lacklustre, so we didn't pimp it that hard. Then, naturally, Devil May Cry 3 arrives and makes us proud. That's because Capcom bothered listening to the fans again.

A quick take on the story: Dante, the protagonist from the first game, is back – well, as back as you can get in a prequel. Devil May Cry 3 takes

place ahead of 1 and 2, featuring our favourite devil-in-a-red-jacket Dante. Running a bit into the series' past, we learn about Sparda, Dante's father, and Virgil, Dante's brother. Now for some reason, Sparda at some point built a massive tower that holds the gate to the demon world. Why he did this we don't know, but that's a god for you. No points for guessing that Virgil and a cohort are planning to open the gate, but they need Dante's blood to do this. And naturally Dante is making his way up the tower, after Virgil sends some monsters after him...

So: onto the action starting with a brief explanation for anyone new to the series. Devil May Cry has always been a high-octane action game, involving guns, swords and off-the-wall moves – literally. Dante's aim is automatically towards anything hostile in his field of view, which leaves players with the freedom of leaping around and trying to execute combos and special moves. The controls have always had a fluid element to them. Thus, bouncing off a wall and suspending yourself in the air while raining bullets down on the monsters, finally slamming down on them with your trusty sword, is child's play. It's a perk of being half-demon, and even acrobatic die-hards like Raziel, Lara and Persia's famed Prince cannot compete.

The problem came in Devil May Cry 2, because too much emphasis was placed on action, negating the style side of the game. In the third iteration, the action and style elements are brought together beautifully. Devil May Cry 3 is still easy to play, but a lot tougher to master. Progressing





through levels and collecting red orbs, which is the currency, will let you upgrade your skills and weapons, building on Dante's repertoire. Each weapon has several upgrade levels and special moves. Thanks to the variety of weapons (such as the three-tiered Nunchuk called Cerebus) players are presented with very different combat styles for each - the sword is excellent for pounding attacks, while the electric guitar (!) is better for taking on large groups, thanks to its magical ability to generate killer bats. Um, yeah.

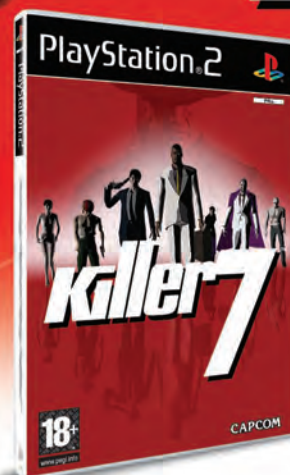
As a bonus, the cut-scenes were directed by Versus and Azumi director Ryuhei Kitamura. In other words; they are absolutely ridiculous (one even involves a girl rocket-jumping her bike), but a huge amount of fun. The cinematics and presentation are half the reason to play the game, and watching Dante's larger-than-God ego in action as the story continues is quite a treat. Also, it makes you feel like a supreme bad-ass, which has always been the point of the Devil May Cry series.

The game is pushing the limits of the PS2, though, so graphically things are okay. But that's got more to do with the hardware limitations. As far as ideas and style go, Devil May Cry 3 is the most impressive by far and just gets our hearts beating faster for the fourth title. Officially, though, in this magazine's not-so-humble opinion, this is the best in the series so far. That's because Dante rocks hard - Capcom just thought about giving him more attitude and a big-ass electric guitar. Seriously, we're not making that bit up. **NAG**

*Locked, stocked
and ready to rock:
Dante is back
for the first time
he's looking for a
party.*



PlayStation®2



OUT AUGUST 2005



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VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 489

Developer

Midway

Publisher

Midway

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

Genre

FPS

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

Players: 1-8

Memory: 200KB

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*No, I don't think
we aliens can
have BO. Put
your arm down!*



AREA 51

WHAT DO DAVID DUCHOVNY (deadpan believer that the truth is somewhere, perhaps his pants), Powers Boothe (from the miniseries *Deadwood*, known only to Americans) and Marilyn Manson (outrageous androgynous musician extraordinaire) have in common? Considering the game being reviewed here, the answer is rather obvious. All three represent yet another Hollywood incursion into gaming, but at least this one holds together well as a game.

Area 51 aka "Dreamland", is the US government's most top-secret and secure (yet everyone knows about it) facility located in the Nevada desert (you can actually see it on satellite photos via www.google.com, out of interest). More importantly, it's the centre-stage for this similarly named game. You play generic protagonist Lt. Nick Cross, a hazardous biological waste specialist who is appropriately voice-acted by monotone Mr. Duchovny (which oddly gives the game just the right sci-fi flair, thanks to Duchovny's recognisable Agent Mulder voice). Sent to investigate a government-sized cock-up in the clandestine super-secret complex, players are instantly thrust into a rather enjoyable First Person Shooter where the action ranges from adrenal to deadening. Ignoring the blatantly uninspired sections yields enjoyment,

depending on how much you can overlook Area 51's various flaws. When the gunfire starts, the enemies react intelligently and the setting becomes immersive. Area 51 is a superlative example of what can be achieved on the PlayStation 2. On the flip side, despite being in a rather absorbing setting, it seems Stan Winston (renowned creature designer for movies such as *Predator* and *Aliens*) was out of ideas, assaulting players with some rather monotonous and unimaginative enemies.

Regardless, Area 51's merits far outweigh its faults. The cohesive and engrossing plot works well with the range of weaponry given to the player with which to wreck carnage (all on the government's tab), while the multiplayer itself has the usual bells and whistles such as death match and online play. All the elements in play, namely combat, exploration, adventure and slight puzzle solving, work reasonably well and don't rub each other the wrong way, with the AI of the government soldiers being worth a special mention for its intelligence and ability to make the player run and hide.

Area 51 is an interesting dichotomy: its tart Hollywood injections blatant yet appealing, the game dynamics bog standard but managing to feel fresh anyway. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PS2 NGC

■ Suggested Retail Price

R 349

■ Developer

Capcom

■ Publisher

Capcom

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

■ Genre

Action

■ Age Restriction

16+

■ Specifications

Players: 1

Memory: 200KB



Everyone knows that in movie-land, the T-Rex can breath fire

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

MOVIE ENTHUSIAST, JOE, WAS the star of something utterly beautiful with the first Viewtiful Joe, originally a GameCube exclusive title. With a bigger budget, Viewtiful Joe 2 sets the stage with more levels, more VFX powers, and more characters - more everything really. Even Joe's girlfriend, Silvia, takes centre stage this time round (when the player wants to, that is).

Essentially, the entire theme behind the first Viewtiful Joe has translated over into its sequel very well. The quirky plot, the cell shading and movie-themed backdrops all make a welcome return. The VFX powers that made the first game so appealing (Mach Speed, Slow Down and Zoom in) are also back for a second round, along with a newcomer; Replay. Players can record certain actions and releasing the

button replays the actions three times. So, hit an enemy while recording and you can then do an extra three punches for the price of one. This also works in reverse. If you're holding down record and get hit, well, you get the idea. This new power, like the existing powers, is used quite often in conjunction with odd puzzles which may be hit or miss depending on what you expect from the game.

Swapping between Joe and Silvia on the fly presents even more character-specific puzzles and play styles. Joe works better in some situations and Silvia in others.

All in all, Viewtiful Joe 2 is a worthy sequel and just as much fun as it's predecessor; containing much more content and then some. If you were a fan of the previous game, Viewtiful Joe 2 will instantly appeal.

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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms



■ Suggested Retail Price

R 361

■ Developer

The Collective

■ Publisher

LucasArts

■ Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

■ Genre

Action

■ Age Restriction

12+

■ Specifications

Players: 1-2

Memory: 70KB

Analogue: Sticks only

Vibration compatible

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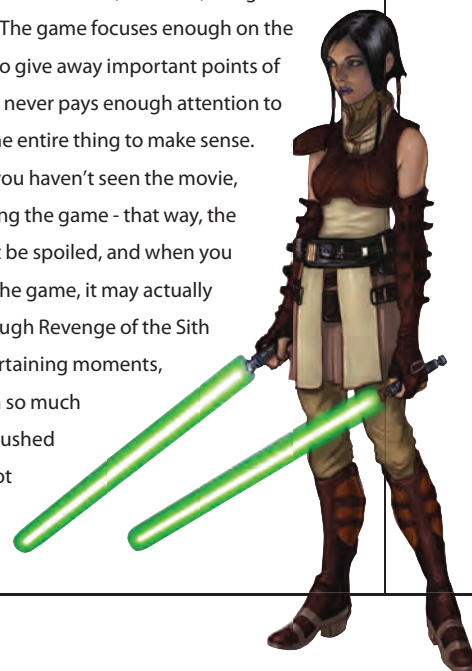
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General Grievous takes a swipe at Obi-Wan, Obi-Wan retires to the desert to talk to dead people

STAR WARS EPISODE III: REVENGE OF THE SITH

JUST IN CASE GEORGE Lucas wasn't already rich enough, LucasArts has been quick to capitalise on the release of the latest Star Wars movie with the videogame adaptation. And following in the tradition established by many Star Wars titles of the past, it's not an utterly dismal failure, but by the same token, it's very, very far from perfect. The game consists of 16 missions (as well as a few bonus unlockable levels), in which you'll take control of either Anakin Skywalker or Obi-Wan Kenobi, and which consist mostly of running around whilst hacking at anything that moves with your lightsabre. Setting this game apart from any other hack and slash action title is, of course, the inclusion of aforementioned lightsabres and Force powers - though, ultimately, neither of these additions is as satisfying as it should be. There are a number of combos that can be performed with the lightsabre, though most of these are initially unavailable. Once they do become useable, there's never really much reason to execute them anyway - most of the time, they just give your enemies openings to attack you, and you realise you're better off sticking with the same basic 3-hit combo you've been using since the start of the game. The Force powers are a more interesting addition, and they do add a certain 'coolness' to the play dynamic

- though the more interesting ones only become available in the second half of the game, which is perhaps not all that troublesome, since the entire game can be completed in about five hours. In its defence though, *Revenge of the Sith* does boast, for the most part, some very impressive graphics and visual effects, as well as a number of cut-scenes lifted from the movie, which are used to set the scene before each mission. This, however, brings us to another problem. The game focuses enough on the movie's storyline to give away important points of the plot, though it never pays enough attention to the storyline for the entire thing to make sense. In other words; if you haven't seen the movie, do so before playing the game - that way, the movie's plot won't be spoiled, and when you do get around to the game, it may actually make sense. Although *Revenge of the Sith* does have its entertaining moments, it could have been so much better. It's far too rushed and uninspired, not to mention too short. **NAG**



Quality platformer that is entertaining, enjoyable, and occasionally requires some thought

78

REVIEW

VITAL INFO

Platforms



Suggested Retail Price

R399

Developer

Avalanche

Publisher

THQ

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

Genre

Platformer

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

1 Player

282KB memory

Analogue: Sticks only

Vibration compatible



Take something this big up and drop and you're eating for weeks

TAK 2: THE STAFF OF DREAMS

TAK 2, THE SEQUEL to the original THQ and Nickelodeon collaboration, is one of those titles that, at first glance, appears to be a kid's game when, in fact, it really isn't... or at least not entirely, anyway. The story revolves around Tak, the goofy hero, sent on a quest to rescue a princess. And to do so, he is required to progress through levels set both in the real world, and in the very surreal 'Dream World'. Like its predecessor, the visual style is definitely of the cute-and-cuddly cartoon variety, and to that end, it's executed extremely well. Once you start playing the game, however, you begin to realise that Tak 2 has been designed to appeal to kids and adults alike, and the play dynamic serves as testament to this. Although all the elements typical of the genre are present, including basic combo attacks, plenty of jumping and ubiquitous collectable items, some of the puzzles are a little more complex than those in your

run-of-the-mill platform title, and require a degree of lateral thinking to solve. In addition to the above, there are of course a number of mini-games on offer, as well as a few other twists to the play dynamic, such as Tak's ability to transform into a variety of animals. Also present is the mandatory platform game sidekick, this time in the form of Jubolba, Tak's shape-shifting mentor, whose abilities are often required to complete various level objectives. The control system is, for the most part, tight and intuitive, though the game is occasionally plagued by camera issues. Voice acting, however, is superb, and the script is well written and executed with numerous inclusions of subtle moments of humour. Ultimately though, Tak 2 is perhaps not the very best in its genre. It is definitely well produced and enjoyable, and should manage to provide entertainment to players of all ages. **NAG**



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E&OE

Quality off-road title, with an excellent degree of depth

79

VITAL INFO

Platforms



Suggested Retail Price

R 399

Developer

Rainbow Studios

Publisher

THQ

Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

Genre

Racing

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Players: 1 - 2

Memory: 293KB

Analogue: Sticks only

Vibration compatible

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*Quad biking
across the
universe...*

MX VS. ATV UNLEASHED

IN A CUNNING DISPLAY of marketing genius, the sequel to THQ's MX Unleashed sees the franchise merging with Rainbow Studios' renowned ATV Offroad Fury series, and the result is indeed quite pleasing. As the title implies, the off-road action now involves not only conventional dirt-bikes, but also four-wheelers – and if that isn't enough, a plethora of other strange contraptions, including golf-carts, monster trucks and even helicopters are also on offer. The vehicles generally control exceptionally well (the airborne vehicles being a notably frustrating exception, however), though the essence of the game is undoubtedly found in the two types of vehicle referred to in the title. A number of modes are available, including hill-climbs, waypoint

racers, free runs and, of course, championship modes, with the emphasis of any race placed either on lap-time or on performing tricks. The physics are convincing, and features such as clutch-control, and preloading of suspension before jumps add depth to the play dynamic. Visually, the game is certainly solid, if perhaps unremarkable, looking very similar to its predecessor, which is not necessarily a bad thing. The soundtrack and effects are also quite competent, and fit in well with the pace of the title. All in all, though MX vs. ATV Unleashed is arguably lacking in innovation - it compensates with a high level of polish and plenty of variety. If you're a fan of off-road titles, you're likely to enjoy it. **NAG**



Well executed and entertaining update to last year's title

75

VITAL INFO

Platforms



Suggested Retail Price

R 399

Developer

EA Sports

Publisher

Electronic Arts

Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

Genre

Sport

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Players: 1 - 4 (Multitap)

Memory: 735KB

Analogue: Sticks only

Vibration compatible

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on field, at
home*

RUGBY 2005

APPARENTLY, EA SPORTS ARE determined to extend their sporting title monopoly to include virtually every sport on the planet, and this is definitely good news for rugby fans. Last year's Rugby 2004 was an admirable effort on the part of EA Sports, despite a number of flaws that prevented it from ranking alongside the company's 'top-drawer' titles. Rugby 2005 represents a very definite refinement of the series, with a number of major problems ironed out, and though still not perfect, it's a very enjoyable title. Notable differences from its predecessor include spruced-up graphics, which although still feeling somewhat lacking, are a definite improvement. The play dynamic feels largely unchanged, though things are a bit smoother this time around,

and manages to remain entertaining, despite that the majority of the action still occurs in rucks and scrums, rather than in free-running play. A number of modes are available, including an improved training mode (dubbed 'Rugby 101', undoubtedly aimed at Americans unfamiliar with the sport), as well as competitions including the Tri-Nations, Six Nations, Super 12, and a 'World League', which functions like a franchise mode, complete with continuous seasons and a transfer market. In addition, this time around you'll also be able to create your own player. Ultimately, if you enjoyed last year's product, you'll appreciate the refinement that's gone into this instalment. If you're a newbie looking for an enjoyable rugby title, you won't be disappointed either. **NAG**



Fast and fun 2D fighter and one that's sure to bring back memories

74

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
PS2
- Suggested Retail Price
R299
- Developer
Ignition Entertainment
- Publisher
SNK Playmore
- Supplier
WWE [011] 462 0150
- Genre
Fighting
- Age Restriction
12+
- Specifications
1-2 Player
97KB memory
Analogue: Sticks only
Vibration compatible

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SNK VS. CAPCOM: SVC CHAOS

IT SEEMS THAT SNK has engaged on a campaign to revive its old 2D fighting titles, and this time, they've brought Capcom along for the ride. The end-product features characters from King of Fighters, Fatal Fury, Samurai Showdown and, of course, Street Fighter, among others. The game dynamic will instantly feel familiar to anyone accustomed to the King of Fighters mechanism, as will the graphical presentation. As with the recently reviewed King of Fighters 2000/2001, it needs to be said that this title aims to be a recreation of the 2D fighters of old, and the graphics are very much in line with that idea. Although it boasts a less extensive roster than that found in the King of Fighters title (SVC Chaos features a total of 36), many gamers will undoubtedly welcome the return of Chun-Li, Dhalsim, Balrog and the likes, and it is this nostalgic appeal that makes the game worthwhile. The mandatory arcade mode is present, as is to be expected, as well as the usual array of training, versus, and survival modes. It goes without saying that if you're a Tekken or Soul Calibur-style 3D fighting junkie, this title probably won't appeal to you. If you long to relive the uncomplicated, fast and frenetic fun you used to have whilst throwing piles of coins at arcade machines, however, SVC Chaos is definitely worth a look. **NAG**

There's nothing quite like old school fighting



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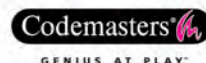
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BEHIND 3DMARK

Benchmarking has evolved from the process of simply testing the capabilities of your system, to a 'sport' whereby gamers build systems dedicated to achieving the best possible benchmark results. 3DMark is one of the most popular benchmarks and this month we speak to Futuremark to see what goes on behind the scenes at the development level.

COMPARING BENCHMARK RESULTS IS the new 'in-thing' and even if you do not have a monster PC, it is difficult to resist the temptation of seeing what scores your PC can achieve. A couple of years back, benchmarking applications were used purely to test computer configurations and to check the stability of computer systems. Even though these are still popular uses for benchmark applications, the advent of gaming and the industry it drives has developed a whole new genre of benchmarking junkies.

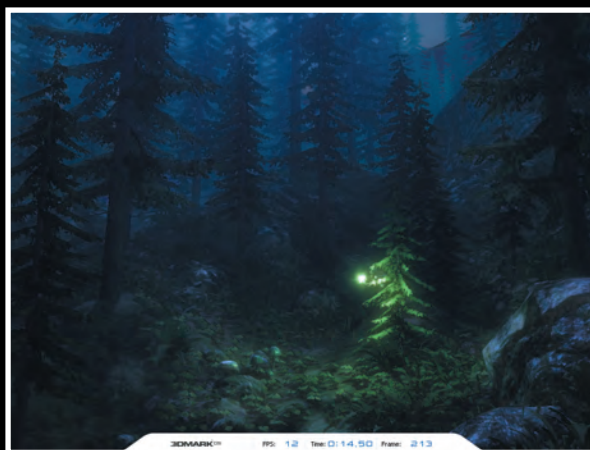
Undoubtedly, the most popular of all benchmark applications are those developed by Futuremark and more specifically the 3DMark benchmarks. Back in October 1998, this company produced the first edition of the popular 3DMark franchise and since then, we have been privileged to see a new version almost every two years. Each new version of 3DMark sports an array of new tests that not only look pretty, but are very functional as they are developed to test a set of technologies found in new graphics cards.

Benchmarks, such as those developed by Futuremark, are known as controlled benchmarks. This is because the tests are controlled and the developers will release updates if driver optimisations or other irregularities are detected. Controlled benchmarks also offer the added benefit that they give the same benchmark result (given



GAME TEST 1

The Game Tests, test various aspects of graphics features aimed at gaming. Game Test 1 reflects 3D performance for games which take place, primarily indoors and things such as Bump mapping, High Detail Geometry and various lighting effects are taken into account. These lighting effects also create dynamic shadows which are looked at in more detail in Game Test 2.



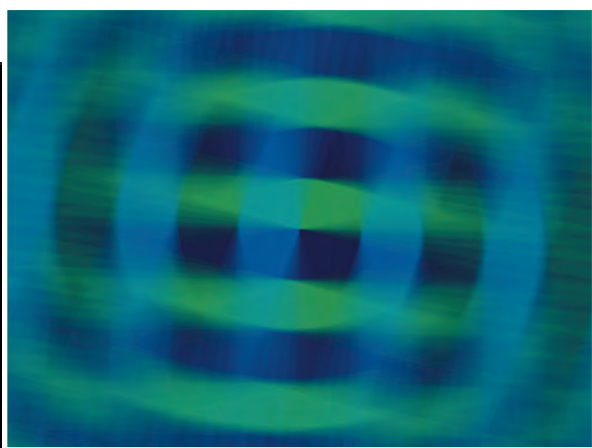
GAME TEST 2

This test features a beautiful night-time forest scene with a firefly flying around. The full moon also illuminates the forest with a bluish light. The key feature of this test is lighting and features taken into consideration include Detailed Geometry, light scattering and fog, and dynamic shadows created from two light sources (the moon and the firefly).



GAME TEST 3

The last Game Test gives an example of a large outdoor scene with fairly complex water reflections of the canyon walls. The water is actually one of the key aspects of this test, and apart from its reflective properties, it also features depth fog, making the sea monster appear deep below the water as it swims under the airship. The air also uses a volumetric fog making some of the canyon walls appear far away.



FILL RATE TESTS

The Fill Rate is one of the most important aspects of any graphics hardware's performance. In actual fact, the Fill Rate is the number of pixels that can be rendered on screen per second. The Fill Rate tests in the latest version of 3DMark are slightly different than that of previous versions. 3DMark05's Fill Rate tests are more theoretical. They do not look as nice as those in previous versions of 3DMark, but they are much more effective as they were designed not to produce bottlenecks at the graphics' memory bandwidth. The two Texturing tests include Single- and Multi-Texturing.



PIXEL SHADER TEST

In Game Test 3, one of the most complex materials was the rock face shader. This particular test is dedicated to just that and is separated from Game Test 3. This test shows the light moving over the rough rock surface. Interestingly, this test features no real-time shadows, only vertex lighting.



VERTEX SHADER TESTS

The last Feature Test in 3DMark05 is the Vertex Shader tests. These tests are divided into two categories: Vertex Shader-Simple and Vertex Shader-Complex. The former produces simple transformations and single light lighting on six high polygon sea monster models. The latter is much more complex and sees a patch of grass swaying in the wind. Each grass straw moves independently according to a fractal noise calculated on the CPU."

a small margin or error) if the same benchmark is run on the same computer.

Developing a benchmark application, such as 3DMark, is a fairly complicated process and is only achievable through close cooperation with various graphics, chipset and PC manufacturers. We spoke to Patric Ojala, Senior Manager of Benchmark Development, and Nicklas Renqvist, Customer & Media Relations Specialist at Futuremark about the development process involved in a benchmark application such as 3DMark.

"There are five steps we follow in developing any benchmark application", Patrick said.

STEP ONE: "In this first step, we use a variety of resources to enumerate a first set of possible features for the benchmark. We draw upon our own experience with previous benchmarks and the feedback we have subsequently received. Communications with the gamer and game developer communities also provide valuable input. The BDP [Benchmark Development Program (www.futuremark.com/bdp/)] member group is another source of insights. Some of the BDP members include AMD, ATI, Intel, NVIDIA, Creative and BitBoys. From these, we develop high-level ideas of features we may include in the benchmark. At this early stage, features and implementation options are intentionally kept open. For example: for 3DMark05 we had decided to implement new type dynamic shadows. The implementation options – using PSM, etc. – were documented, but a specific method was not chosen."

STEP TWO: "The document produced in the previous step is a proposal. It is designed to present features and implementation options in a format amenable to getting constructive feedback. This proposal is circulated to our BDP members. The feedback received helps us in choosing features and implementation methods."

STEP THREE: "In the third step we create a written benchmark specification. Each of the workload tests is specified in detail with exact versions of the technologies used. The specification is circulated to the BDP members. The feedback is analysed and incorporated at our discretion."

STEP FOUR: "In the next step we implement prototype code to see if the available technology will support our plans. We may discover that certain tests are not possible, or may be surprised to discover that more can be achieved. The results are incorporated into the specification and again circulated."

STEP FIVE: "The fifth step consists of implementing the workloads or tests. Periodic releases are made to the BDP members and their feedback may again be taken into account."

"The end result is a wonderful application that allows us, the media and you, the end-user, to benchmark and compare various hardware configurations."

Each 3DMark benchmark is made up of various tests. 3DMark05, more specifically, features three Game Tests, one CPU test, and a set of Feature Tests.



ORB

A SPIN-OFF TO THE BENCHMARKING craze is the race to see who can produce the highest benchmark score. In aid of this, Futuremark has also developed ORB (Online ResultBrowser).

As its name implies, ORB is a collection of benchmark results spanning the 3DMark and PCMark benchmarks. It is a place for you to upload and save your benchmark results and to compare them to other users' results by defining a range of search criteria. ORB also allows you to innovatively add a description of your computer or benchmark conditions. Each project is assigned a Project ID, and if the score was achieved using the approved drivers, the project will be given a comparison URL that you can give to friends and fellow benchmarkers so that they can compare their results to yours.

In the past there have been numerous driver discrepancies which caused irregularities in many of the scores produced. To ensure comparable and valid benchmark results, Futuremark lists the approved WHQL (Windows Hardware Quality Labs) graphics drivers on their Website (www.futuremark.com/community/drivers/?approved). These drivers are tested by Futuremark to ensure that there are no 3DMark specific optimisations present and only benchmark results that were run on these approved drivers will be used in any official listings.

ORB STATISTICS

Registered Users	2,760,207
3DMark05 Projects	582,905
3DMark05 Published	41,429
3DMark03 Projects	3,209,193
3DMark03 Published	126,897
3DMark2001 Projects	7,921,992
3DMark2001 Published	1,190,275
PCMark04 Projects	778,207
PCMark04 Published	30,634

INTERVIEW

Nicklas Renqvist

Customer & Media Relations Specialist
Futuremark Corporation



How did Futuremark start? Did you see a need for benchmark applications, or was there some deeper meaning to it?

Futuremark was founded back in 1997 as a spin-off company from Remedy (the talented team behind Max Payne). There was a clear need for professional, easy to use and objective benchmarks for PCs, so 3DMark was born. Actually there was a benchmark released before 3DMark, 'Virtual Reality', but 3DMark99 was the first in the 3DMark-series.

What can we expect from Futuremark regarding benchmarks for Dual Graphics Card systems?

All our current benchmarks support dual graphics cards. We don't have any immediate plans to produce separate benchmarks for dual graphics card systems, as the performance boost you get by using two graphics cards is showing in games too.

Futuremark exists for testing computer hardware, but we are seeing that consoles are starting to dominate the market. If this trend continues, how does Futuremark see its future when consoles take most of the market share away from the PC?

I don't think that gaming on the PC will ever die. On the contrary, I think it will be getting stronger. I was simply amazed by the next generation consoles, or mostly by the announced specifications, but we shouldn't forget that they also work kind of as an 'accelerator' for the PC market. I have no doubt that the PCs will only get faster and produce better looking graphics than ever before, thanks to the consoles. The games we have seen from the next generation consoles will most probably make their way to the PC, and hopefully this time, in as high-quality as they are on the consoles.

The last, and current, generation of consoles are not really up-to-par with the current PC hardware, and as game developers usually produce games first and foremost for the consoles, the PC versions are not that much better looking, even if it would be possible. Now when the next generation consoles really look like they will have an edge over the current PCs, I think that the PC versions of the console games will look as astonishing! The developers will be able to produce high quality games for the consoles, and when converted for the PC, the visuals will stay pretty much the same. It is a win-win situation for all gamers, both

on the PC and consoles. Besides, not everyone is willing to trade in their keyboard and mouse for a controller, at least when playing first person shooters.

This means that the need for objective and reliable benchmarks for the PC will continue to be there – now, and in the future.

What is Futuremark doing to prevent graphics drivers from 'cheating' by using 3DMark specific optimisations?

We have Futuremark Approved Drivers listed on our Website and by using them, the user can be sure that the result is valid. Whenever a new WHQL (Windows Hardware Quality Labs) certified graphics driver is being released, we start to test the driver to be used with 3DMark03 and 3DMark05. We have our own tools and testing methods to see if the driver has some 3DMark specific optimisations. When we have approved the drivers, we post them online as 'Futuremark Approved', and also flag them as approved in the ORB (Online ResultBrowser). Only results achieved with Futuremark Approved drivers will be used in any official lists, or services. More information and the list of the approved drivers can be found on our Website www.futuremark.com.

Will we be seeing a physics benchmark soon since it's becoming a hot topic in games?

At the moment we don't have any plans for a separate physics benchmark as there is currently no physics hardware available on the market. But we are looking into using more physics in our future products.

Futuremark recently introduced SPMark04, but it was developed only for Symbian OS and Series 60 phones. Microsoft-based Smartphones are becoming very popular, especially here in South Africa. When are we going to see some benchmarks for that platform?

We have some very interesting mobile phone products in the pipeline, but unfortunately I can't talk about them yet. We are well aware that the mobile phone sector is a logical step up from the PC market for us, but there are very few standards (API) for all the different mobile phones, which makes it very difficult to produce a benchmark that can be fully compared on all different operating systems and platforms.

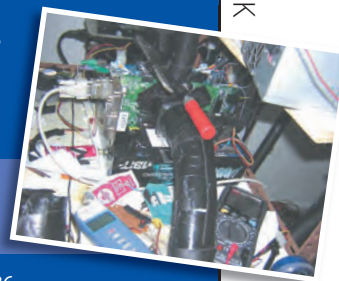
You told us that you cannot comment on future developments, but can you give us something that will wet our appetites?

We usually don't comment on unannounced products, but I could make a small exception this time. We are indeed in the middle of producing a new 3DMark, as well as a new PCMark. The next PCMark is getting close to be finalised, but I can't comment on the release date - at least not yet. The next 3DMark is also already looking good, and will be released 'when it's done'. We have stuff in there which looks absolutely amazing, and I am confident that when we release it, people will agree. I'm maybe stepping out on a limb here, but I'd like to think that the next 3DMark will be something we haven't done before. **NAG**

THE TOP 3DMARK05 SCORE

AT THE TIME THAT the magazine went to print, the top score for 3DMark05 was 14,472.

Obviously this score was achieved on a machine that was overclocked by means of 'special' cooling. The exact specifications follow:



CPU:	AMD FX55 @ 13x264 - > 3,444MHz @ 1.76V
Graphics:	2 x ASUS 6800U SLI @ 627/1386
Motherboard:	DFI NF4 Ultra- >SLI mod
Memory:	Kingston Hyper X BH5
PSU:	SilverStone 650W Power Supply
Temperatures:	CPU: -94°C Graphics Card 1: -88°C Graphics Card 2: -89°C

HISTORY OF 3DMARK

3DMark99 / 3DMark99 MAX

- 3DMark99 was the first 3DMark released by Futuremark in October 1998, and was designed for DirectX6.
- 3DMark99 MAX was released six months later, introducing many improvements to the original 3DMark99.



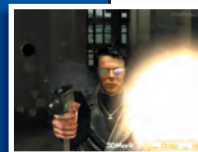
3DMark2000

- 3DMark2000 was designed for DirectX7 and introduced HW T&L (Hardware Transform & Lighting).



3DMark2001 / 3DMark2001 SE

- 3DMark2001 was designed for DirectX8 and introduced the use of Pixel and Vertex Shaders, though only one of the four Game Tests required hardware capable of Pixel Shader 1.1.
- 3DMark2001 SE was released one year later and was designed for DirectX8.1, introducing the use of Pixel Shader 1.4 in one of the Feature Tests.



3DMark03

- 3DMark03 was designed for DirectX9 and introduced the use of Pixel Shader 2.0 in one of the Game Tests.



3DMark05

- 3DMark05 was designed for DirectX9 and was the first benchmark to require hardware capable of Pixel Shader 2.0 for all Game Tests. 3DMark05 truly demonstrates the power of higher level shaders.



TECH NEWS

Laser optical mouse

Agilent Technologies recently revealed laser optical sensors to be used in upcoming computer mice. The system uses laser instead of a LED, providing much higher resolutions (2000dpi) and is able to work on surfaces that give current optical mice difficulties. The sensor will also be ideal for gaming purposes, as it will be able to track movements of up to 45 inches per second at accelerations of up to 20g, and will boast a framerate of over 7000fps.



JOYTECH OPENS IN NORTH AMERICA

This renowned European peripherals manufacturer has opened an operation in North America. Its product line was exhibited at the recent E3 expo in LA. Products that the company is currently emphasising include the following: The 8-inch portable digital LCD monitor has been designed with the PS2 in mind, and includes an in-car power adapter. A TV tuner is available as an optional extra. AV Control Centre is a system that routes all audio-visual equipment's cabling through what is essentially a centralised hub. This device, which interconnects up to eight pieces of AV equipment, allows users to select their input and output devices, and features signal processing functionality. Williams F1 Force Feedback Racing Wheel for the PlayStation 2 is exactly that – a racing wheel for this console. It is a visual replica of the Williams F1

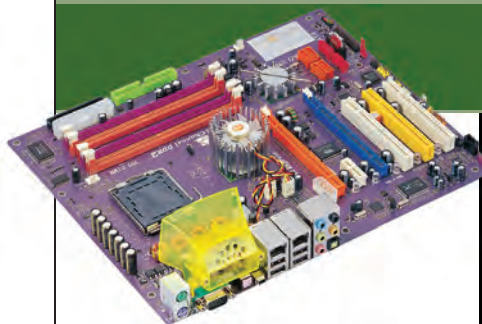
Team's FW23 steering wheel. The Neo 2.4GHz Wireless Controllers are available for both PlayStation 2 and PC, and boast a range of up to 50 feet (15 metres), and a battery life of 100 hours. A wired USB version is also available for PC, which makes use of MouseMimik technology to enable it to emulate mouse functionality, should such be desired.





MUTANT MODS

StarTech.com has launched a line of computer mod products under the Mutant Mods label. The range will include a bewildering variety of cables, fans, case windows, lights and other assorted decorative paraphernalia.



NEW MOTHERBOARDS FROM ECS

At the recent Computex expo in Taipei, Elitegroup Computer Systems unveiled three new motherboards built around the Intel 945 Express platform. The boards boast all the latest technologies, including SATA II (3Gbps), DDR II memory support, Dual Core, EM64T, GigaLAN, PCI Express x16, RAID, as well as advanced proprietary overclocking technologies. All the boards are already available.

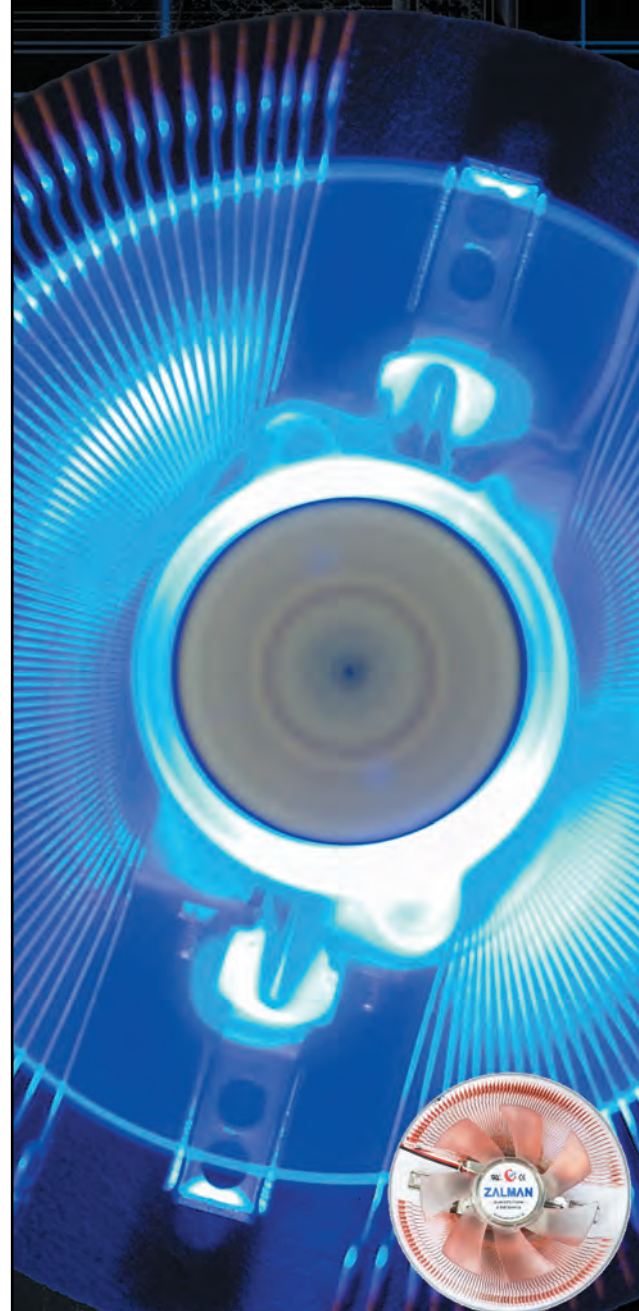
ANTEC PERFORMANCE TX CASES

This new range of PC cases conforms to Intel's Thermally Advantaged Chassis design guide, meaning that it is designed with heat reduction as a priority. Four models are available, all of which feature an adjustable CPU fan duct that can accommodate any system. The cases also boast side panel vents for cooling the graphics card, and mounts for numerous case fans in addition to the 120mm case fan that comes standard. Other features include front connectors (USB, FireWire and audio) and a washable air filter.

Antec TruePower 2.0

Antec has introduced a new range of power supplies that provide quiet performance. The fan's speed is automatically adjusted to match current load conditions, allowing it to run as slowly as is safe at any given time. Case fans can also be connected to the power supply, benefiting from the same speed control functionality.

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RSX – PS3's graphics power-plant

At a recent press conference, Sony and NVIDIA revealed RSX – the PlayStation 3's graphics processing unit. The processor will connect directly to the Cell CPU, and will deliver two teraflops of processing power. The chip will contain 300 million transistors, which is more than the total number in the CPUs and GPUs in the three current consoles – combined!

Liquid metal cooling

Sapphire has developed a new processor cooling technology that makes use of liquid metal pumped over the GPU by means of an electromagnetic pump. The evaporation/re-condensation cycle yields temperature transfer rates about 65 times better than water, which is currently the best cooling approach commonly available. The first Radeon X850 cards from Sapphire to use this new technology will start to emerge this month.

ATI supports AMD dual core tech

ATI's new Radeon Xpress 200 platform offers full support for AMD's Athlon 64 X2 dual core processors. The CrossFire Edition also supports dual-GPU implementations.



THERMALTAKE HEAT-CONSCIOUS CASES

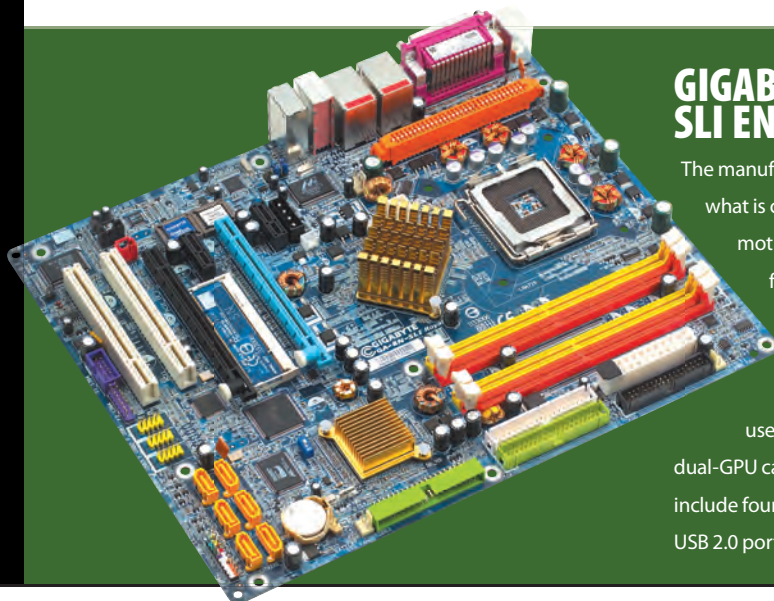
The company's latest offering is the Armour VA 8000 Series, which features advanced heat dissipation mechanisms. Air is actively ducted in from the front and ejected out the rear and top, and CPU and power supply each gets a separate solution. The cases themselves have been designed to act as heatsinks, which allows one model to be fan-less for completely silent running. [www.corex.co.za]

NVIDIA GeForce 7800

The next generation of NVIDIA graphics cards are on their way. The new series will be labelled 7800, 7800GT and 7800GTX – the company has dropped the 'Ultra' suffix. The new range, which will carry up to 512MB of memory, is expected to replace the 6800 line in terms of pricing, pushing the latter's price-point down – welcome news for many, no doubt!

THRUSTMASTER 2-IN-1 DUAL TRIGGER RUMBLE FORCE

This mouthful of a name heralds Thrustmaster's latest addition to its gamepad range. This device is compatible with both PC and PlayStation 2, and features the two progressive triggers that can be programmed for precise control. The gamepad also features a powerful force feedback system. This toy should be available by the end of the year.



GIGABYTE PUSHES THE SLI ENVELOPE

The manufacturer is currently at work refining what is currently named the GA-8N-SLI Quad motherboard. This board, which carries four PCI Express slots for graphics cards, will be capable of running up to four NVIDIA-based SLI graphics cards. Alternatively, users may opt to run two Gigabyte 3D1 dual-GPU cards. Other features of the board include four DDR2 slots, four SATA II ports, ten USB 2.0 ports and three FireWire (IEEE1394) ports.



XBOX 360 ACCESSORIES

A range of accessories for Microsoft's next console will become available possibly even before the system itself! The Video Camera will offer video recording at up to 640x480 resolutions at 30 frames per second, as well as being able to take still images at 1.3 megapixels. It will feature a built-in microphone for videoconferencing functionality. The Headset will include an adjustable boom, noise-cancelling microphone and in-line volume and mute controls. It will connect directly to the controller, whether wired or not. The Memory Unit will have a capacity of 64MB and will require no setup; the console itself will support up to two concurrent Memory Units. Lastly, a Universal Media Remote will be available, which will provide user-friendly control over the console's media functions. Additionally, it will carry A, B, X and Y buttons for basic access to the console's other functions.

AOpen's Pandora's box

AOpen has developed a prototype miniature PC called the Pandora. The styling resembles Apple's Mac mini. The system uses the Pentium M processor, originally intended for laptops, to reduce space and cooling requirements, and the Intel 915G chipset provides a variety of media handling capabilities. The Pandora, which may reach retail toward the end of the year, is targeted at users who may employ it as a media PC.

GAMER-ORIENTED ASUS GRAPHICS

New Asus graphics cards now carry three unique features aimed at hardcore competitive gamers. GameLiveShow is a technology that can stream live what's happening on a user's screen over the Internet. GameReplay allows players to record MPEG4 replays of anything they play. GameFace Messenger is a videoconferencing capability, allowing up to eight players to communicate during play. It boasts ease of use, and will pop up a window of any speaking player, but keep silent ones hidden, in order to maximise screen space. New Asus cards ship with these features, while existing users may download updated drivers to enable these extended capabilities.



PSP Stereo Station

This efficient gadget is a combination speaker-set and charging cradle. In addition to charging the PSP's battery, it can simultaneously charge a second battery. Height and angle are adjustable, and front-mounted buttons grant access to media playback functions. [www.hipgearproducts.com]

Technological Furniture



Aluminum Enclosure
with Mirror Finish

NST-360U



onyx black brilliant red midnight blue

External Hard Drive Enclosure



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Antec

ABIT

ZALMAN

ACECAD

ViPower

DACAL

Thermalright

Tatu

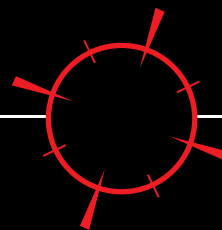
VANTEC



tel +27 11 466 0038/9 fax +27 11 466 0033
www.frontosa.co.za it@frontosa.co.za

ATI CROSSFIRE

MULTIPLY & CONQUER



We all knew it was coming. Ever since NVIDIA surprised the graphics industry with the announcement of SLI, everyone has been waiting and watching for ATI to announce a comparable or superior solution. Analysts and gamers speculated about how prepared ATI was for SLI, and how long it would take them to challenge NVIDIA for the ultimate graphics speed title again. Some believed ATI was caught unprepared. However, ATI's solution, called CrossFire, shows that it is no rushed stopgap solution, but everything SLI is and more.

A DIRECT COMPARISON BETWEEN SLI and CrossFire is inevitable, so we might as well get it out of the way. As many gamers know, NVIDIA's SLI requires that your graphics driver supports the application specifically so that it can use both cards properly to achieve higher performance. ATI has outright scoffed at this limitation and one-upped NVIDIA in that CrossFire will work for all 3D accelerated applications - both Direct3D and OpenGL, without any need for specific drivers or patches. This is a significant feature, and will likely be one that sways many gamers who have been sitting on the fence towards the ATI camp. Fans of older or obscure 3D titles that NVIDIA may not ever get around to adding support for will be able to increase their performance using CrossFire without a problem (according to ATI).

If that weren't enough, ATI has also decided to pack in some other features to improve the overall usefulness of having two graphics cards. First off, they've added a rendering mode called SuperTiling to the list along with the Alternate Frame Rendering and Scissor mode of SLI. SuperTiling divides the screen like a chessboard into a series of squares. These squares are then assigned to each of the two graphics cards. ATI has demonstrated that this technique offers superior load-balancing between cards, and in military simulators based on Radeon technology has demonstrated up to 34 cards running in parallel using this method. ATI says the upcoming versions of their Catalyst drivers will automatically select the best rendering method for games it can identify, and allow the user to set a default or individually configure a mode for games it cannot.

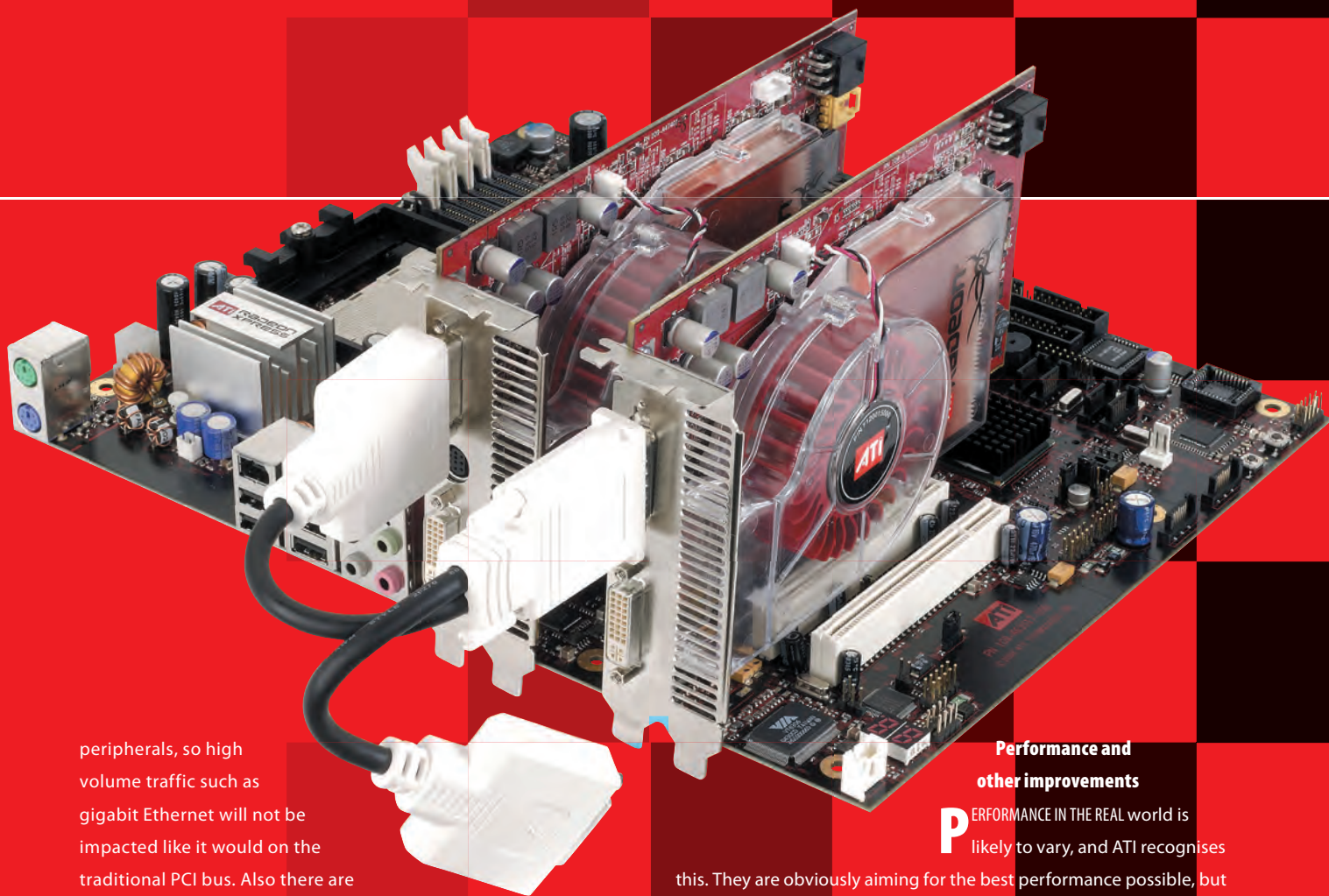
ATI also has something to offer those who believe that their games already run at a sufficiently fast frame rate at their resolution of choice. CrossFire can run a fourth mode called SuperAA mode, which provides extended antialiasing options in the driver. ATI explains that in SuperAA mode, each card renders the scene using a different antialiasing pattern, and then the two images are combined in the buffer that normally assembles tiled or split images. This allows them to add antialiasing modes for 8x, 10x, 12x and 14x, with claims of a significant image quality improvement over single card antialiasing.

What you need

THE OTHER HOT CONTROVERSY is what combinations of graphics cards will be able to be used in the CrossFire setup. NVIDIA specifies that for SLI to work both boards must be the same GPU model, manufacturer, and BIOS version or there will be trouble. ATI is proving to be a bit more flexible, and it would seem they only require the VPU to be of the same series. The downside is that for CrossFire to work at all, one of the cards must be CrossFire enabled, to act as the master card. These special cards will be made only by ATI, and contain the frame composting engine required to assemble the image from the two separate cards. So far they have announced a Radeon X850 CrossFire Edition with 256MB that will work in conjunction with any X850 Platinum Edition, X850 Pro and X850XT card, and a Radeon X800 CrossFire Edition in 256MB and 128MB versions that works with any X800, X800 Pro, X800XL, X800XT, and X800 Platinum Edition board. Yes, All In Wonder boards are also compatible with the CrossFire system and will function normally.

Also, for the setup to work, it needs to be used with a motherboard that has a CrossFire certified chipset. Right now, ATI has limited this to their Radeon Xpress 200 CrossFire edition chipset, which will support both the Intel and AMD platforms. ATI says that Intel chipset motherboards that have two physical x16 PCI Express slots will work as well. They have not ruled out the possibility of CrossFire setups working on NVIDIA's Nforce 4 chipset, but for now the official answer is no. The unofficial answer is it should, but it can't be guaranteed until a lot of quality testing has been done to make sure.

Fortunately, ATI has decided to try and make their CrossFire enabled motherboard chipset the ideal chipset for high-end gamers and enthusiasts. The chipset supports High Definition Audio, four SATA-II ports with NCQ and RAID features, eight USB 2.0 ports, and four additional PCI Express lanes that can be used for slots or additional onboard chips such as FireWire and Gigabit Ethernet. ATI claims that CrossFire graphics setups will not lag any other bus



peripherals, so high volume traffic such as gigabit Ethernet will not be impacted like it would on the traditional PCI bus. Also there are no jumpers, switches, or boards required to configure the board between single and dual graphics card mode, it's all done in the BIOS.

ATI has designed the CrossFire chipset motherboards for overclocking out of the box, with stock cooling. The chipset heatsink is passive, with no fan, and is designed to offer higher than standard clock speeds without any additional effort or cooling. The chipset itself is based on a 130nm low power process, and ATI claims the overclocking potential offered is "huge, even without specialised cooling". Their engineers supposedly viewed it as a challenge to have the best enthusiast chipset on the market, so hopefully it will deliver.

To connect the actual boards themselves, ATI uses an external cable that connects from the DVI port of the standard graphics board to a port called the DMS port of the CrossFire board. This port looks somewhat like a DVI connector at first glance, but has a slightly different shape and size, so hopefully it will not cause much confusion for users. The cable then splits off into a standard DVI connector. This is a slightly different approach from NVIDIA's hardware bridge connected to the SLI cards internally. The benefit is that it will allow more flexible motherboard design and slot placement. The drawback is that it'll be one more cable in the back of your case. Overall it's probably a slightly more user-friendly option.

Performance and other improvements

PERFORMANCE IN THE REAL world is likely to vary, and ATI recognises this. They are obviously aiming for the best performance possible, but much will depend on the application. According to ATI, "Performance enhancements with CrossFire are application dependent. Performance improvement varies from 1% to 100% performance increase. New, graphics intensive applications will generally see over 80% performance improvement at high resolutions and image quality modes."

Also, ATI has redoubled their efforts to produce high quality drivers for gamers. Their control centre application has been given an overhaul, and is now fully functional on 64-bit versions of Windows XP. Even more impressively, ATI claims that there will be a new, certified, Catalyst driver every month from now on, without exception. Users will be able to track Catalyst version numbers fairly easily, as the first number is the year of release, and the second is the month. So for example, Catalyst version 5.6 would represent June 2005. They have also merged the drivers for the mobile versions of the X700 and X800 series into the main Catalyst drivers, so that notebook users will no longer be left behind. The standard mobility features for these chips will not be sacrificed; they are now to be standard in every driver. The new drivers will also include a slew of other features targeted at other users, from better and easier Linux support, to improved video and de-interlace control, to media centre extensions that support HDTV resolutions including the new 1080p mode.

ATI has fired their return salvo in response to SLI, and now the ball is back in NVIDIA's court. **NAG**

ABIT RX600 PRO-GURU

ABIT'S COLLECTION OF OVERCLOCKING tricks, integrated into their high-end motherboard line-up, is at this point a commonly recognised technology, and a key differentiator for the company in the gaming market. uGuru, as it is known, is seen as a means of extracting more performance from your system hardware without the hassle of actually knowing what you are doing, utilising a combination of software tools and firmware support.

Now the company has launched its first vGuru-based products, which, as the single changed letter suggests, is overclocking functionality specifically for graphics cards. In this first iteration, it is an ATI X600 Pro-based graphics card with 256MB video RAM and a PCI Express x16 interface.

By default, this budget-oriented solution runs at frequencies of 405MHz and 257MHz (514 DDR) for the core and RAM respectively. Based on the R380 GPU, this card has four vertex pipelines and two pixel shaders, and is designed to compete with lower-end 6600 and even 6200 offerings from NVIDIA.

Run at default frequencies, the Abit offering manages playable framerates at medium quality on the major gaming titles commonly used for benchmarking today, namely Half-Life 2 and Far Cry. What's more: it delivers a smooth gaming experience complete with the high visual quality I have come to expect from ATI cores, even without image-enhancing antialiasing or anisotropic filtering enabled,

which frankly, kills the framerate.

In Doom 3 the limited pipelines and restricted memory bandwidth punish it however, and at anything but the lowest resolution of 640X480, this title is unplayable on the X600 Pro.

Overclocking is taken care of via a software tool called OCGuru, which presents the user with a wide range of tweaking options, providing manual control of both frequency and voltage for both core and RAM. But possibly the safest way of getting more performance from this card, is a small jumper which can be moved over from Normal to XTurbo mode.

This changes an LED mounted next to the jumper from green to red, and boosts the core to 500MHz while leaving the memory speed at default.

Running in XTurbo mode gives the RX600 a slight edge in the titles it already did well on, allowing you to turn on fractionally more detail in both HL2 and FarCry and still get a very playable game. However, in Doom 3 and

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Low cost, Good image quality

■ Cons

Poor performance overall, Overclocking causes instability

■ Supplier

Frontosa [011] 466 0038

■ Internet

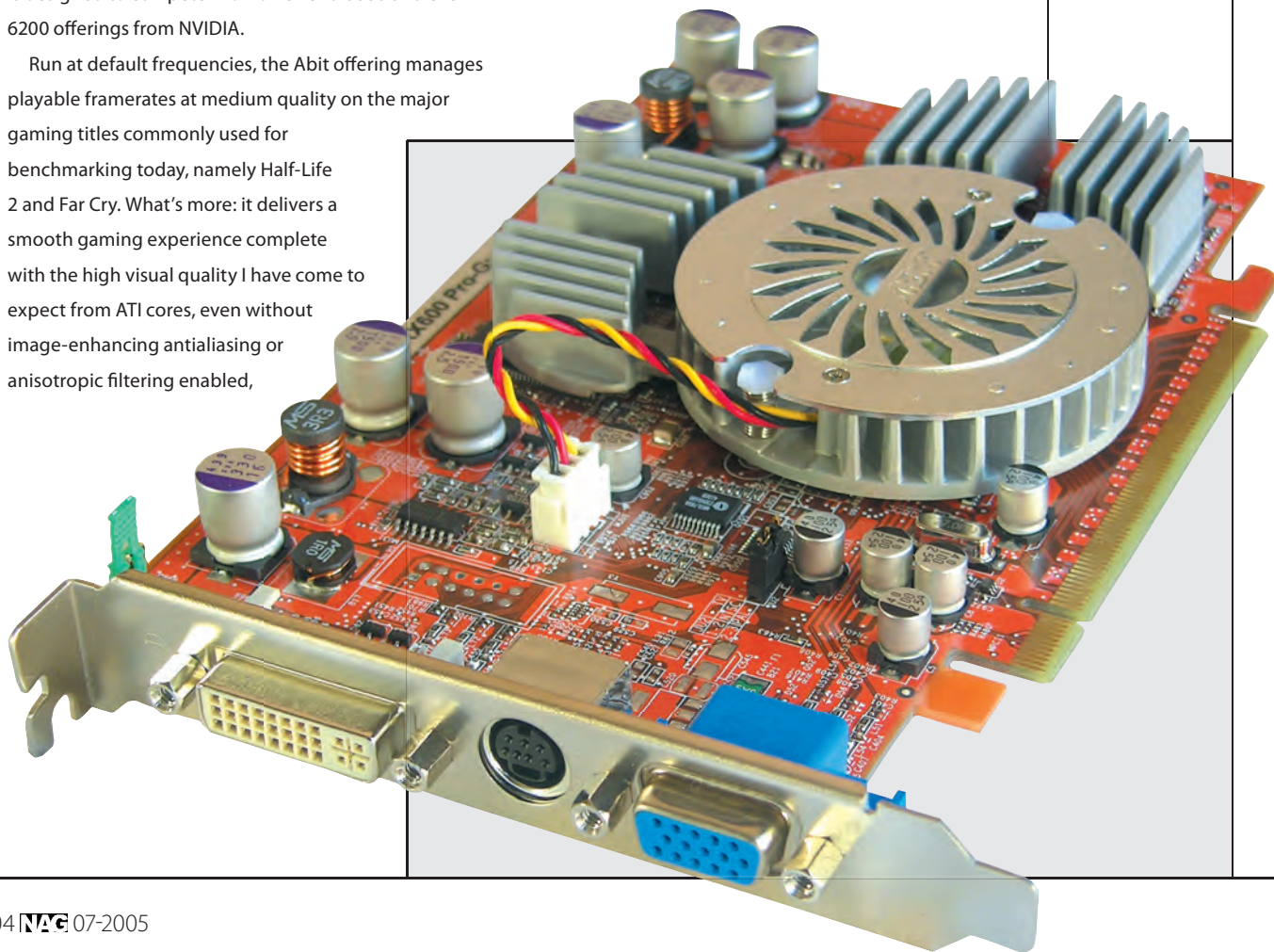
www.frontosa.co.za

■ RRP

R1425

■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett



a couple of the other new titles currently available, the identical RAM speed remains the performance inhibitor, and in fact, this Abit card delivers fractionally lower framerates at these tweaked frequencies.

Toying manually with the settings of the card allows you to push the memory up to over 350MHz, while the VPU is capable of 527 while maintaining its stability. These settings also drove the temperatures being controlled by the Abit-branded heatsink unit up significantly - by a full 16°C under load.

The performance figures increase nominally once more at these settings, and Doom 3 plays a bit better, but still largely unacceptably, while other titles benefit from average framerates a point or two higher than in 'Normal' mode.

Once more I find myself asking if overclocking functionality should be something which is so easy to do and so accessible to the mass consumer. Sure vGuru brings some limited success in eking out the last bits of performance from an otherwise uninspiring card, but it also increases the danger factor of costly hardware failure by increasing temperatures on the board itself.

This review, for instance, ended with the RX600 Pro failing to boot any machine it was plugged into. Admittedly, it had undergone a wide range of overclocking tests, but these had caused some manner of failure within just a couple of days of operation. Not terribly encouraging for your hard working home system.

It is really an attractive idea at the end of the day, extracting more oomph from the hardware you've paid for. But until automatic overclocking can really be 100% infallible and the hardware concerned guaranteed to continue to work, rather buy the best base hardware that you can get for your money and only overclock if you know your way around the frequencies and voltages of your system quite intimately. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Excellent response time and crisp colours at a low cost

■ Cons

Limited OSD options, Very plastic, Flickers

■ Supplier

Golden Nest Electronics
[011] 466 3485

■ Internet

www.gne.co.za

■ RRP

R2280

■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

CMV CT-720D 8MS LCD

IN THE EYES OF the gamer, the LCD monitor has one fatal flaw. The response times of the panels, making up the screen, cannot match the response times of a traditional CRT monitor, resulting in that ugly and off-putting 'ghosting' of an image in fast-paced games and movies.

Recently however, LCD manufacturers have introduced their fastest-responding LCD panels in 17-inch units targeting this exact enthusiast market. These latest panels halve response times from the 16ms previously attained down to 8ms, which ought to dramatically affect the playability of fast-paced games, with Quake III Arena the ultimate example.

BenQ and ViewSonic both already have 8ms LCD offerings, but both utilise panels from the same manufacturer and therefore suffer slightly from an identical drawback. In order to produce the rapid response times quoted, these panels use only a 6-bit colour range giving a total of 16.2 million colours supported. It's no tragedy, but can result in slightly off-colour reproduction of particularly tricky tones such as natural-seeming human skin.

CMV, with its panels manufactured in-house, claims to offer 8ms response times on panels with full 8-bit colour capabilities, yielding the 16.7 million colour output our

eyes are more accustomed to.

Immediately, the response time improvement of this white and silver CMV unit, the CT-720D, is very impressive. Even fast-twitch 180-degree snaps leave but a barely noticeable trail, which only becomes a problem if you're really searching for it.

Colour reproduction is good, and with a wide horizontal viewing angle of 160-degrees remains faithful even when viewed from an angle. Image geometry is of a similarly high-quality, but pronounced flickering, particularly of interlaced images, is an inexplicable side effect of the new panels in this application.

The OSD is also rather poor, providing an inadequate range of tweaking options - your best choice is the auto-adjust button situated on the face of the screen, should your image need some adjustment. Fortunately this feature works well for the most part. Input options include DVI-B as well as conventional analogue D-SUB, and a stereo audio jack to provide signal to the very low quality integrated speaker unit.

For gamers, the CMV CT-720D is easily the best choice if a flat-panel is a must-have. What's more, it is very affordably priced, and although this cost-saving is evident in its construction it is nonetheless a compelling package overall. **NAG**

GIGABYTE NEON COOLER 8 – PRO

A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING would be a good description for Gigabyte's new addition to the herd. A simple looking aluminium heatsink with attached fan stares back at you - reminiscent of the coolers of three years ago. Perhaps the only telling sign that things are not as they seem, is the addition of the four blue LEDs at the base of the fan cage.

Upon closer inspection, however, a few other aspects become apparent. The standard fan cage has given way to one which has four horizontal slits in its sides. The aluminium heatsink's fins do not all touch the base of the fan cage, and the aluminium heatsink has a copper cylinder at its core.

This design lends itself to a fan which produces less noise as there is little or no return air pressure on the fan blades (as a result of the fins not all touching the base of the cage). The horizontal slits in the sides of the fan cage allow air to 'escape' outward, assisting in the cooling of surrounding motherboard components. The polished copper core accelerates the amount of heat conducted from the CPU core to the aluminium heatsink fins.

In addition, a new mounting system has been utilised. A plastic lever simply pushes the mounting lever over the motherboard's mounting clips. This negates the need for tools and ensures a speedy installation.

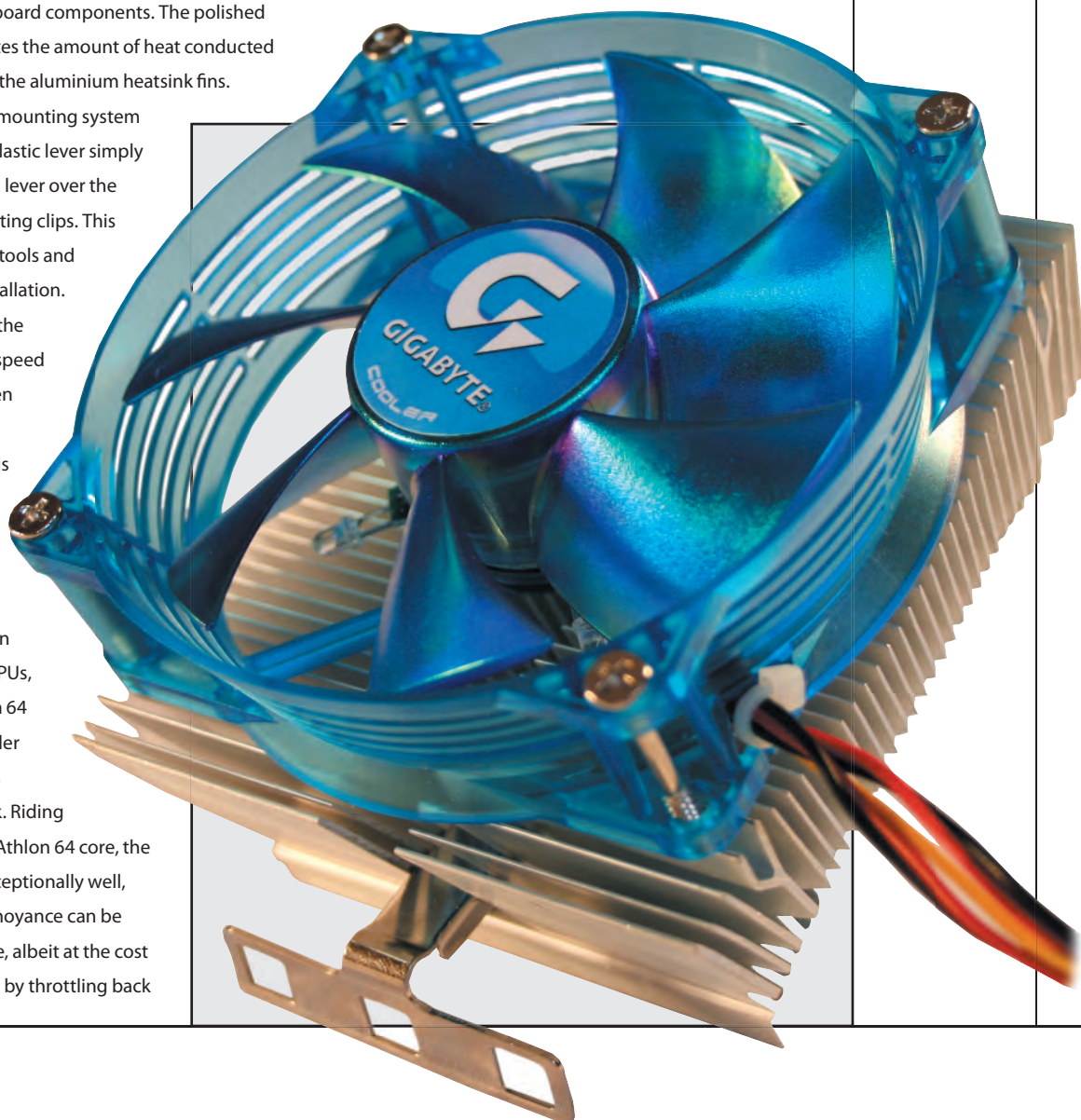
The Pro version of the cooler features a fan speed controller which, when set to maximum, is obnoxiously loud. This however, is soon forgotten once the cooler's ability is realised.

Designed for use on AMD's Athlon FX55 CPUs, as well as their Athlon 64 4000+ cores, the Cooler quickly comes into its own when put to task. Riding atop an overclocked Athlon 64 core, the cooler performed exceptionally well, albeit noisily. This annoyance can be cured to some degree, albeit at the cost of performance gains by throttling back

both the fan speed as well as the CPU's overclocking. When used to cool a standard Athlon 64 core, the unit was able to do so admirably with low noise levels.

The cooler weighs only 450g, measures 94 x 94 x 25mm and should fit most systems comfortably. The cooler comes packaged in a small box together with the fan speed controller and thermal paste. The polished copper core of the heatsink is well protected with peel off tape. The fan speed controller unfortunately seems somewhat cheap, as it has no housing, and looks rather like a PCI blanking plate with a variable speed knob attached. In addition, the supplied thermal paste appears less than impressive and as a result we opted for a well known silver alternative.

This classic, stylish heatsink with included blue luminescence and awesome cooling power, coupled with a small footprint and low weight, should see the Neon Cooler 8 – Pro in high demand amongst the gaming fraternity. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Awesome cooling, Classic looks, Lightweight and relatively sized

■ Cons

Noisy, All-copper design would have made for better cooling, Fan speed controller looks cheap

■ Supplier

Rectron [011] 203 1000

■ Internet

www.rectron.co.za

■ RRP

TBA

■ Reviewer

Victor Moore



THERMALTAKE PUREPOWER 460W BLUE LIGHT

THERMALTAKE RECENTLY RELEASED ONE of the most powerful PSUs available today, its Purepower 680W. The company simultaneously expanded its mid-range offerings with this unit, the Purepower 460W Blue Light (for those on a small budget who still want the protection and stability of a high-quality power supply).

Now, I have never had cause for complaint when it comes to the Purepower PSU range. Every one I have tested had supplied reliable voltages, and the Xaser unit in my personal system continues to protect my machine from the relatively spiky power coming from the circuits of my old house some 18 months after purchase.

This latest Purepower 460 includes all the power protection functionality expected of a range-topping PSU, as well as the Thermaltake PFC (Power Factor Correction) technology which compensates for leakage induction to deliver a more efficient power frequency.

The casing incorporates an attractive and effective open honeycomb lattice at the rear of the unit for improved airflow, while gasses are blown over the guts of the unit courtesy of a substantial 120mm fan mounted behind a rather tacky gold protection grid. Fortunately,

when the unit is in action, the blue LED lighting around the clear fan eradicates the golden look, and creates a nice subdued lighting effect inside your system.

Attached cables provide all the power options you could need, including a 20-pin main board power plug complete with the ability to snap an additional 4-pin connector onto the side to create a 24-pin power solution. There's also native SATA power support and a 6-pin PCI Express power connector for high-end graphics cards - which I have seen support for only once - as well as nine conventional 4-pin Molex connectors.

As for the power it pumps out: combining dual 12V rails with active PFC create an exceptionally stable supply of more than sufficient power for almost any system. The Thermaltake Purepower 460W is yet another commendable PSU offering from Thermaltake and comes highly recommended if you're looking for a reliable supply of voltage for high-end and therefore power-hungry components. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros
Excellent power characteristics with all the connector options you could need

Cons
Dodgy aesthetics of the gold grille

Supplier
Corex [011] 707 5000

Internet
www.corex.co.za

RRP
R1095

Reviewer
Russell Bennett

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GIGABYTE G-POWER COOLER (BL)

AN ALUMINIUM RADIATOR BALANCES spectacularly on four heat-pipe stilts spewing forth from its one side. These in turn integrate at their base into an all copper nickel plated heatsink compatible with Intel LGA 775, Intel P4, and AMD K8 and K7 processors. Attached to the upper side of this perched radiator is a large blue cage incorporating a 110mm blue ball bearing fan and four blue diodes. The sides of the cage bear four horizontal slits allowing for fan air to pass through and cool surrounding motherboard components and capacitors. Welcome to Gigabyte's G-Power Cooler (BL-Blue).

It is evident from the onset that Gigabyte has targeted the gaming and enthusiast market with the G-Power cooler. It is also evident that they mean serious business. One cannot be blamed for having sordid dreams about the G-Cooler's fantastically good looks, nor about day-dreaming about the benchmark numbers that will make your rig the talk of the town.

Get ready to paint the town red....uh, no wait... blue.

The design of the cooler is sheer genius. With the fan and cooling radiator/heat-pipes sitting above the CPU, the cooling ability of the G-Power is many-fold. Firstly, the air being blown downward by the large fan cools the heat-pipes within the radiator. Secondly, this air, which has passed through the radiator,

then washes over the heatsink sitting atop the CPU. Thirdly, the components situated around the CPU benefit from not having air channelled in any specific direction as the air pouring down from above is able to disperse in a circular pattern cooling all the surrounding components. Add to this the fan cage with incorporated slits, and you have a very quiet, very powerful cooler.

How do the heat-pipes work? Basically, the heat-pipes are pipes/tubes partially filled with a liquid that absorbs heat and then vaporises. This vapour is then channelled away to an area where it can be cooled (the radiator). Here it returns to a liquid and then flows back to its

source (the CPU).

This form of cooling has multiple benefits over conventional heatsinks, the most important being that the heat can be conducted away from the source for cooling to take place.

The heatsink footprint profile is roughly the same as with conventional heatsinks, but the height profile is very low, as heat-pipes are used. This allows the heatsink to be installed in more than one direction and makes for rapid and effortless installation.

Gigabyte has packaged their seductive cooler into a transparent plastic container, setting it apart from the pack at the onset. Included in the package are all the tools (clips/mounting brackets/screws) for installation onto the abovementioned CPUs. Also included, is a tube of thermal paste and a simple user manual.

Oozing pure aesthetic appeal, the cooler is appreciated even more when powered. Illuminated in blue, accentuated by the semi-transparent blue fan cage, the cooler can hardly be heard. Raining down pure chill, this is sure to be the coolest Cooler in the pack. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Very quiet,
Very powerful cooler,
Awesome looks

■ Cons

No fan grille

■ Supplier

Rectron [011] 203 1000

■ Internet

www.rectron.co.za

■ RRP

R170

■ Reviewer

Victor Moore





VITAL INFO

- **Pros**
Above average CPU cooling
with below average noise
- **Cons**
Just barely an improvement
over Intel OEM coolers
- **Supplier**
Corex [011] 707 5000
- **Internet**
www.corex.co.za
- **RRP**
R350
- **Reviewer**
Russell Bennett

THERMALTAKE JUNGLE525 AE

TESTING A CPU COOLER can be a business fraught with inherent danger. The thing is, and this is particularly true of the Pentium 4 LGA 775 socket layout, small variances in how the unit is mounted can make a huge difference in how it performs.

A case in point was this Thermaltake Jungle525 AE (or Advanced Edition). The first time this cooler was plugged onto my 3GHz test bench system, one of those fiddly plastic clips, which the new CPU package has become famous for, must have not clicked in quite properly - a difficult issue to spot and the unit both felt and looked secure. Upon bootup however, the CPU temperature shot straight up to 68°C and steadily climbed even further ...

Those 'convenient' clips always seem to work better the second time they are installed, even on the OEM Intel SmartCooling fan/heatsink combo. So after removing and reseating the Jungle from scratch, things were clearly more secure and the unit was ready to demonstrate its capabilities.

The Jungle AE features a large 90x90mm fan, slightly deeper than standard at 32mm and with plastic sides helping to direct air down through the heatsink fins. The aluminium fins

are arranged to create a circular shape similar to the OEM unit, surrounding a copper base plate and CPU contact area.

The AE also features a 4-pin power connector with PWM which basically endows it with the same continuously variable fan speed of the Intel OEM cooler.

Once properly seated, the unit was able to keep the processor cooler than the standard solution, running comfortably under extended load at 40 to 42°C. With the standard cooler, this figure spent more time at the 45°C mark.

Aside from this three degree temperature delta, the Jungle was somewhat quieter than the standard unit as the large fan was able to create more airflow at lower RPMs. It's not the kind of quiet that you'd go "wow!" about, just slightly below average.

The Jungle AE is an aftermarket LGA775 cooler which will give you a couple more degrees of leeway, potentially useful if you're overclocking. Otherwise, however, it's all very run of the mill and may not be worth upgrading from the standard Intel item unless it's those few degrees you really need. **NAG**

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LOGITECH MX518

RECENTLY LOGITECH LAUNCHED A new gaming mouse, the MX518, targeted squarely at the gamer. Unlike its Laser counterpart, the MX1000, which was launched last year, this mouse is corded, which, according to Logitech, is because a corded mouse is much more responsive in a gaming environment.

It boasts one feature in particular most gamers will welcome with open arms: on the fly sensitivity adjustment. This great feature allows you to switch the mouse sensitivity between 400dpi, 800dpi and 1600dpi without having to 'Alt+Tab' to Windows from within a game. You simply need to press the 'Increase' or 'Decrease' buttons situated on either side of the scroll wheel. Another big plus is the fact that you don't even need to install any drivers for this to work. By default, the sensitivity adjustment buttons have three settings: 400dpi, 800dpi and 1600 dpi. But you can customise this and have up to five different sensitivity increments if you install the SetPoint drivers.

Logitech didn't try a fancy form factor or new ergonomic shape; they simply took a tried and tested model and tweaked it slightly. If you are familiar with the MX510, you should know what we are talking about. The pattern on the top of the mouse is also very funky and very unique. It almost looks as if there are dents on this mouse. This optical illusion is sure to raise some eyebrows at your next LAN event. The rest of the MX518 mouse is covered in a matt-black rubber coating which has a semi-soft feel to it.

As was the case with the MX510, this model features a thumb rest on the right side while the left side is curved down, allowing your hand to rest comfortably on the mouse. We were impressed to see that the MX518 only featured the absolutely necessary amount of buttons from a gaming perspective. By the thumb rest are two generic buttons, while on top of the mouse is one application switch button and the two sensitivity adjustment buttons on either side of the scroll wheel. All

of the buttons are customisable using the new SetPoint 2.3 Drivers which are included.

From a gaming point of view, this is a superb mouse. Being able to switch the sensitivity of your mouse while in a game is awesome and really does make a difference especially when you go from sniping to using a rocket launcher. Sadly, only gamers playing First Person Shooters will really benefit from the advantages this mouse has to offer. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Pros

On the fly sensitivity change,
Similar design to the MX 510 mouse,
SetPoint drivers allow you to customise your sensitivity increments.

■ Cons

Only FPS gamers will benefit from this technology,
Where is BF2?

■ Supplier

DCS [011] 466 5099

■ Internet

www.logitech.com

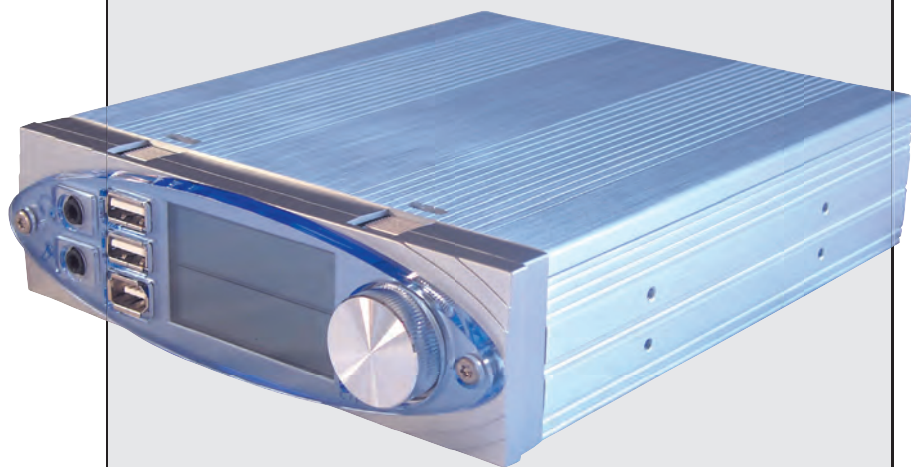
■ RRP

£599

■ Reviewer

Regardt van der Berg





DIGIPANEL

THERE HAS BEEN A myriad of case modding peripherals available to our local market for some time now, and we are glad to see that this trend is not slowing down. The DigiPanel is another device in the 5¼-inch bay line-up which brings many of your back panel connectors to the front, while featuring an LCD display informing you of your fan speeds and internal temperatures.

The DigiPanel doesn't look as funky as some of the devices on offer by Cooler Master or Thermaltake, but it does the job well. Included with this device is a set of cables used to connect the USB 2.0, IEEE-1394, audio ports, as well as three thermal connectors and three fan connectors.

The LCD is blue-lit which makes it easy to read in the dark, while the round control knob allows you to adjust the fan speeds in increments of three. If you want to stay informed as to the temperature status of your case, you

can set a temperature threshold which will sound an alarm if any of the components reach it.

As is the case with many of these devices, this one also doubles as a hard drive cooler. Your hard drive fits inside the DigiPanel while a fan situated at the bottom cools it.

Sadly, the one major drawback of the DigiPanel is that none of the ports on the front panel connects directly to your motherboard. This means that you will need to connect the USB, audio, and IEEE-1394 cables to your back panel ports. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Monitors fan speed and temperatures,
Thermal alarm

■ Cons

Connectors don't feed off motherboard, but rather from back panel connectors

■ Supplier

Eurobyte [011] 234 0142

■ Internet

www.eurobyte.co.za

■ RRP

R799

■ Reviewer

Regardt van der Berg

NexStar.3

Form and functionality collide with style in the NexStar 3 External Hard Drive Enclosure from Vantec. With its mirror finish, sleek curves and bold colors, the Vantec NexStar 3 stands out from the crowd. The sturdy drive cage protects your hard drive while the aluminum case effectively draws away the heat, protecting your drive from overheating.

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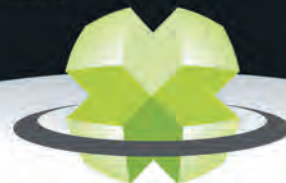
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LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

XAVIX SPORTS CONSOLE

WHO SAYS GAMES SHOULD be about sitting on your ass and pushing buttons? The Xavix console features peripherals that resemble the real thing – tennis racquets, baseball bats and even fishing rods. And playing these games become really, really addictive...

Supplied by:

Reviva (021) 409 7952
R849 for the console,
R500 – R549 for the
games



The Cartridges

Thanks to the cartridge system, most of the technological upgrades on the Xavix come from the games themselves, meaning your console itself lasts much longer before needing an update.



The Games

The graphics aren't great (though the Xavix 2 chip will apparently push this area a lot faster), but the games are fun. Locally you can get Baseball, Golf, Bowling and Tennis, with plans to release Jackie Chan's Boxing and Exercise, as well as a fishing game (complete with different types of conditions, fish and a fish finder), soon.



The Peripherals

Bats, rods, bowling balls, racquets – these are a few of the hardware pieces that feature on the Xavix. Using wireless signals, you stand a distance from the console and take your swings.





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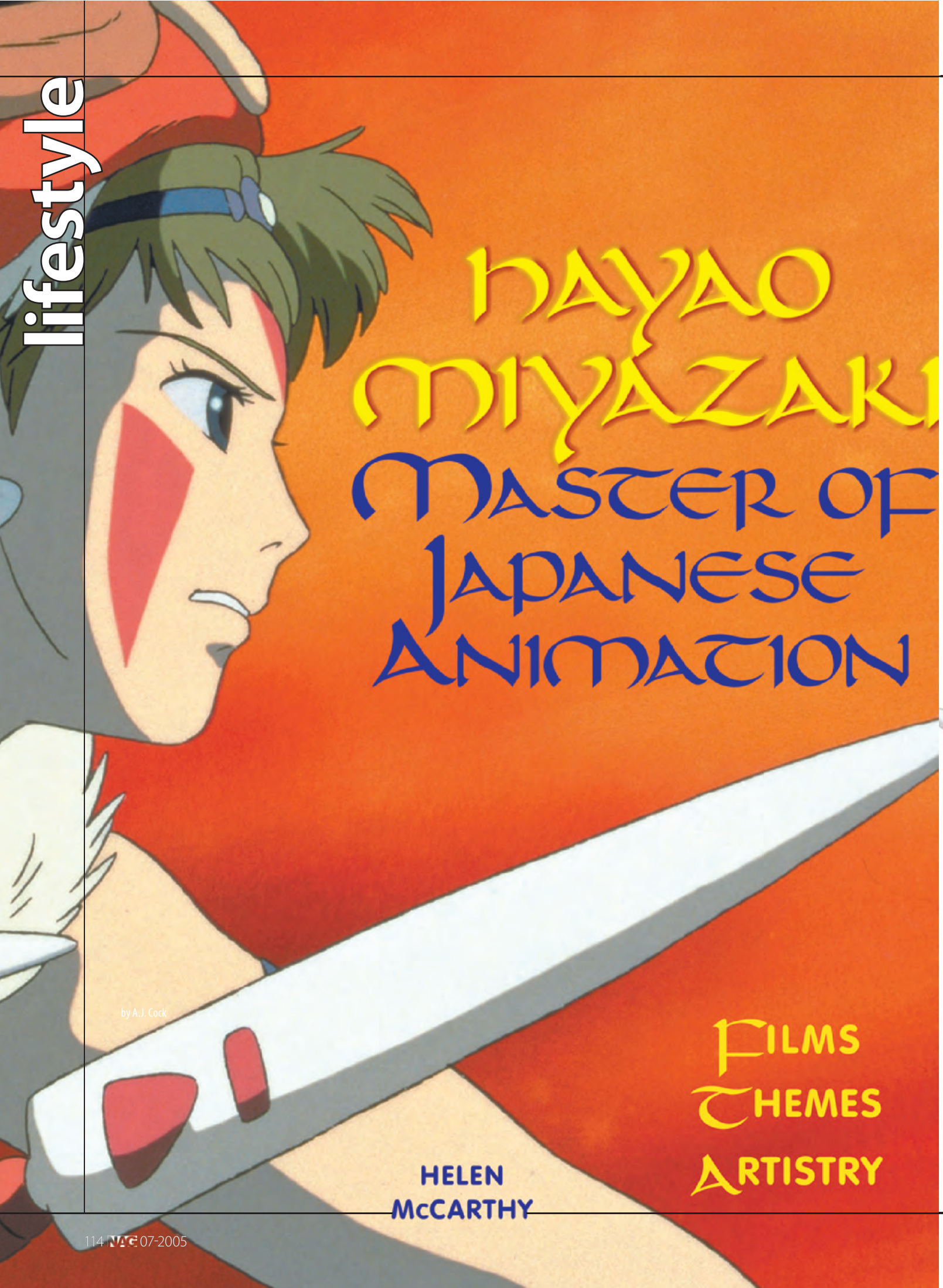


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lifestyle

HAYAO MIYAZAKI MASTER OF JAPANESE ANIMATION

by A.J. Cock

HELEN
McCARTHY

FILMS
THEMES
ARTISTRY

Helen McCarthy Author of Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation

FORMER ANIME UK MAGAZINE editor, Helen McCarthy's (HM) book on Hayao Miyazaki explores seven of his major films and reveals not just an animation master, but also a meticulous craftsman who sees his work as a medium for shaping the humanistic and environmental concerns of our times.

Was 'My Neighbor Totoro' your first step into the realm of anime or were there others?

HM: Like many people in the UK, I'd seen anime on TV as a child, without really being aware of it being Japanese. My first steps into anime, where I knew I was watching something from another culture, were giant robot shows like 'Mazing Z' and 'Mobile Suit Gundam', and of course I watched the edited and dubbed children's TV shows like 'Marine Boy', 'Battle of the Planets' and 'Sherlock Hound' with new eyes after that. The first time I saw 'My Neighbour Totoro' I'd already seen quite a lot of anime, but Miyazaki's work spoke to my heart in a unique way.

What did you do before you became interested in anime?

HM: I've been a fanatic reader and writer from childhood. I love music, and I love to sew. I recreate historical costumes and I embroider. I like to walk and look at nature. Anime didn't entirely take over my life, although while I was working on magazines, the schedule didn't leave a lot of time for anything but work. I still do the things I enjoyed before anime.

How does Hayao Miyazaki manage to create so many amazing movies?

HM: If I knew the answer to that, I'd be a rich and famous film director with a shelf full of awards! I believe Miyazaki's creative power springs from his intelligence and his conscience. He's very widely read and cultured, and he's interested in the whole world and passionate about life. Also, he has a very strong will and a drive to do what he thinks is right. I don't think anybody could be a director without a strong will to put a project onscreen, because there are so many pitfalls.

You interviewed Miyazaki for your book. How would you describe him as a person?

HM: He's very considerate and courteous, in an almost old-fashioned way - a gentleman in the true sense. He listens intently and answers very fully. An interview with him is like wandering round a strange town - you may not walk the exact route you intended, but you'll go down some fascinating alleyways and see interesting things.

Do you think that the current inflow of manga and anime to the West is sustainable?

HM: Yes. Manga is under more threat because we read less every year. But if you look at Europe, the USA, Australasia and the rest of the Anglophone world, that's

a big market.

If you could be a character in one of Miyazaki's movies, which one would you want to be and why?

HM: I've never wanted to be a character in someone else's movie, but I have a real admiration for both Ma Dola in 'Castle in the Sky' and Gina in 'Porco Rosso'.

What do you think of using a term like 'neo-manga' (neo-anime) to distinguish between 'Japanimation' and alternative culturally influenced anime and manga, and do you think that a distinction should be made?

HM: A distinction should certainly be made. I use the term 'pseudomanga' because it describes something in nature which mimics another organism, but is not actually the same. Anime and manga are the Japanese words for animation and comics. If you want to distinguish the Japanese article from, say, French or Polish animation and comics, it's OK to use those words. But why use them about anything that isn't Japanese?

Comic-related live action movies are currently flying high with the success of 'Spiderman', 'X-Men' and now 'Sin City'. More 'mature' animation is also currently in the works, for example: Platinum Studios' 'Dylan Dog: The Fourth Kingdom' and 'Bonesaw'. Do you think the time is finally here for the West to break free from the 'children animation only' category and start appreciating serious animation?

HM: It's just a question of mass marketing. There have been a few people in the West who've loved all kinds of animation for years. But it's started to pay to market it to the rest of the population.

What anime are you currently watching - if any at all?

HM: Too much of it! I've had nine months away from the TV while writing a book on manga, but now I'm back in my armchair working on anime again. You have to remember that most people turn on the VCR or DVD player for fun; I do it to go to work. When I'm watching for fun I enjoy most things the first time around. Even if a show is formulaic there's usually something you can get from it. But I return time and again to the classics - Miyazaki, Lupin III, original Gundam, Mobile Police Patlabor. I love 'Vision of Escaflowne', and last year I was really stunned by 'Voices from a Distant Star' and 'Re: Cutey Honey'.

Do you have any new books planned for the future?

HM: Yes, but I can't tell you about them right now. My next publication will be '500 Manga Heroes and Villains' from Chrysalis Books in Britain and Barrons in the USA, and it should be out in October 2005. **NAG**



www.nag.co.za

It's new! It's improved! It's one big forum! Let's face it, having a news-driven games site locally is redundant. Everyone is intelligent enough to type in 'Gamespy'. So, instead, the NAG site gives people exactly what they want: more room to bitch.



www.kotaku.com

Who needs mainstream game sites? Kotaku is a long-running quasi-blog that is all about gaming. You might not find out about ATI's latest card here, but you will discover things that are a lot more interesting and fun.



www.toastedpixel.com

We're not sure why we like this site, but we do. Maybe it's because they like Zombies. Maybe it's because the comic is funny every now and then. Maybe it's because they love writing about unintelligible stuff we like reading about.

Gary Gygax's Necropolis

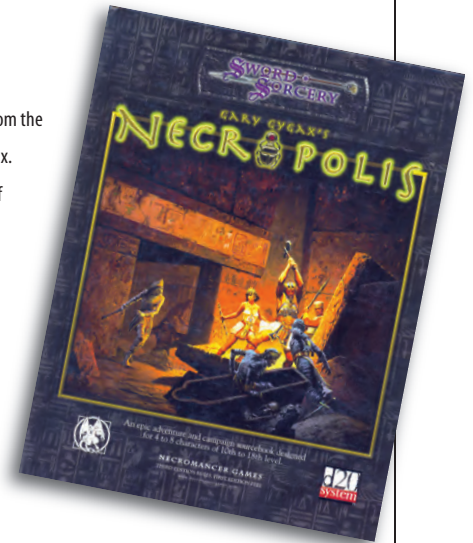
ONE OF THE EARLIER products produced for the D20 system came from the pen of the godfather of pencil and paper role-playing – Gary Gygax. This tome, published by Sword & Sorcery (the D20 division of White Wolf Publishing) is unique in many ways.

Ostensibly a campaign setting, Necropolis is actually more of a pre-generated set of adventures for the player to follow in the mythical land of Khemit. What however sets this apart from the standard pre-generated adventures, that role-playing publishers so often foist on us, is the fact that these scenarios add up to form a truly massive campaign, all contained within one book. There is no need to purchase any add-ons or additional material. This campaign is complete with all the necessary source material inside for the game to run smoothly. The only other book that is needed is the Dungeons & Dragons 3rd edition player's guide.

The land of Khemit is a pseudo-Egyptian sort of place, full of ancient curses, oases, desert towns and, of course, long lost tombs. It is reminiscent (for some or other reason) of the tomb crawling and desert fighting second chapter of the Diablo II computer game. While some may not really like this setting, it is, for the most part, rather original.

But Necropolis is actually a bit more than just a series of adventures. The source material within the book can allow the DM, should he be willing to take the time, to create adventures of his own in this highly detailed world. And he may well have to – the campaign contained within the book is advised for characters of 10th to 18th level. This is perhaps one of the only downfalls of the campaign – the characters need to be well established before they can take it on properly. The setting offers a few new character classes and a host of new monsters and deities. It is a well thought out book, and the whole thing seems to just... well, work.

Necropolis was originally published in 2002, and so may be a little hard to find. Its popularity wasn't massive, but it has a sort of cult appeal to role players who want to experience something a little different without straying too far from the general spirit of Dungeons & Dragons.

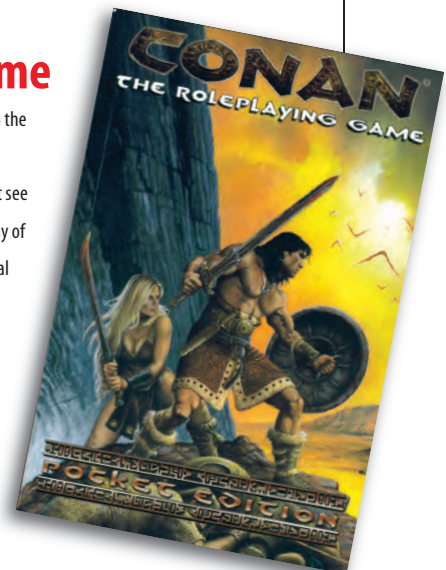


Conan – The Role-playing Game

THIS STANDALONE CORE SOURCE book allows players to set up a campaign in the world of Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian. It has been released in a so-called 'Pocket Edition' which, while certainly quite compact, we simply don't see fitting into any average pocket! Nevertheless, while not a huge tome, it's just shy of 400 pages and packed with useful, relevant content, which covers both historical and geographical topics, as well as game rules and reference tables.

The system is based on the d20 rule-set, as pioneered by Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition, and is in fact almost identical, with a few minor (and, we would say, welcome) modifications. The few tweaks that have been made are consistent with the setting, and the new skills are both cleverly designed and capable of introducing humorous situations.

Our only gripe with this source book is the lack of illustrations and, more importantly, maps. A chapter at the beginning of the book describes the various nations making up this realm, but other than vague "north of this" and "to the east of the other" references, readers are given a very nebulous idea of the lay of the land. On the other hand, this does promote game master creativity, ensuring that no two campaigns are identical.



The X-Play Insider's Guide to Gaming

By: the X-Play Crew with Marc Saltzman

Price: R329.95

Supplied by: Pearson Education | www.pearsoned.co.za

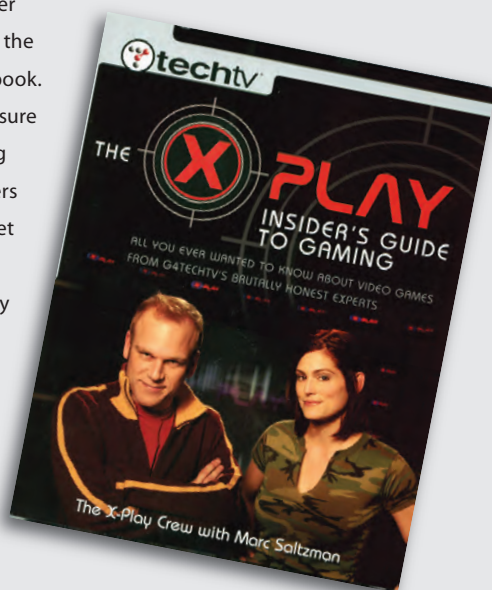
X-PLAY IS AN AMERICAN television show that broadcasts on the G4techTV channel and focuses on everything gaming related. In typical gaming fashion, the presenters try to upstage each other with their offbeat ways. Despite this, the show has received acclaim as one of the few thought provoking game review shows on television.

With its popularity at a high in the United States, the show has put pen to paper and released its Insider's Guide to Gaming. Weighing in at a hefty 468 pages, it promises to provide readers with all they ever wanted to know about video games from the X-Play panel of experts.

The book is divided into eight chapters, each focusing on a different genre in video gaming, i.e. first-person shooters, strategy, fun stuff, platformers, horror, sports, role-playing games, and action and adventure games. While it is interesting to read the X-Play staff's opinions of different games, the contents age quickly. Also, some might argue against the need for a book such as this, since there are many reputable video game news sites on the Internet that provide reviews free of charge.

There are interesting snippets about the different games scattered throughout the book that are not as easily available, but these are few and far between. Even the X-Play staff biographies feel disjointed rather than adding to the flavour of the book.

This book is sure to be a blessing for many gamers without Internet connections. For the majority though, this book is a waste of money.



Game Character Development with Maya

By: Antony Ward

Price: R479.95

Supplied by: Pearson Education | www.pearsoned.co.za

COMPUTER-GENERATED ANIMATED MOVIES HAVE seen a resurgence over the past few years. Movies like Shrek and Finding Nemo have been raking in the money at box offices worldwide. There are potentially lucrative careers in character modelling available for talented artists and those willing to work hard.

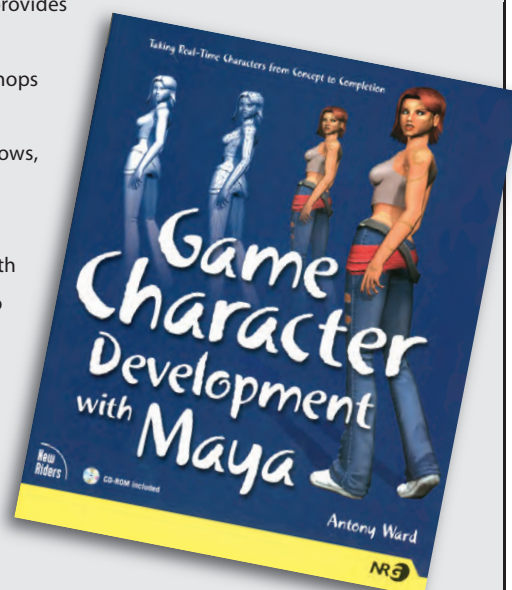
Maya software is the design suite of choice for many modellers. In fact, with characters like Lara Croft and Master Chief to its credit, Maya is the solution every character artist wants to use. For some users, the mysteries of Maya remain just that. While it is a powerful solution, it is definitely not the most user-friendly of modelling tools available.

Game Character Development with Maya aims to show potential character modellers just what it takes to create a game character. From the initial concept and back story to animating a fully modelled 3D character, the book shows readers how to benefit from one of the most powerful packages available.

Obviously, this book has a specific target market in mind so do not expect it to be an easy read if you are not familiar with some of the concepts behind character modelling. Author Antony Ward does make it accessible to a large extent, but it is still heavy on theory and design concepts.

While it does not presume to be an exhaustive study of Maya, the book certainly provides the reader with

enough workshops to get him/her started. Who knows, perhaps there is a future movie modeller in South Africa waiting to be discovered?





Lemony Snicket's 'A Series of Unfortunate Events'

THIS FILM IS BASED on the first three books of Lemony Snicket's 'A Series of Unfortunate Events'. It tells the story of the Baudelaire children, three young orphans looking for a new home. They are taken in by a series of odd relatives and other people, including Lemony Snicket, who narrates the film, and starting with the cunning, dastardly and nauseating (in terms of acting) Count Olaf (Jim Carrey), who hopes to snatch their inheritance from them.

If there's one thing 'A Series of Unfortunate Events' effectively demonstrates, it's that even with a strong cast and a big budget, one can still quite easily drop the ball in regards to developing an effective family film. Beautifully designed and with a general feel that Tim Burton would either be proud of or annoyed at for ripping him off, 'Lemony' struggles to find a direction in which to flow in terms of narrative and accessibility.

On the one hand it's too dark to appeal to youngsters; however it's also too young-skewing for teens and over. All ages though may have trouble with the very episodic feel of the movie which has various repetitive segments that could easily be interchanged. As the film goes on, and the settings keep changing, audience patience will wear through as Sibling and co. fail to build any tension or suspense as things stumble their way toward a fairly silly climax.



Finding Neverland

THE POWER OF IMAGINATION lies in suggestion and belief. If you believe hard enough in anything, it will be true.

Finding Neverland proposes exactly this, creating a world that is involving simply because we are asked to make it real.

Set in the early twentieth century, Finding Neverland tells the tale of already renowned playwright and thinker J.M. Barrie.

Stuck at a crossroads both emotionally, (his wife is becoming further estranged from him) and artistically (a recent theatre failure), Barrie meets the Llewelyn Davies boys. Sparking a friendship with their mother, Sylvia, Barrie embarks upon an enduring friendship with the family that grows to threaten much of what he knows. It is from this era, however, that Barrie produces his finest work, the ever popular Peter Pan.

The film's raw strength lies in its conviction and sensibility. Forever planted in two worlds, Barrie (played with precision innocence by Johnny Depp) is harangued by the constant needs of his real world. From this, the author takes the children, and the viewers, through the consciousness of life and into the realms of the imaginary. Believing in this enough to convincingly make that other world feel real, is one of the picture's greatest assets. While there may be moments where the viewer is grounded back in an everyday world (Barrie is first accused of being involved with Mrs. Llewelyn Davies, and later implicated in a scandal involving the children), for the most part there is pure delight in indulging Barrie's fantasies. We too are taken into Barrie's gentle world of pirates, bears, flying fairies and cowboys.

Finding Neverland is rare film experience that strikes the right combinational balance between sentimentality, sensitivity and nostalgia.



Garbage Bleed Like Me

Once the champions of ultra-sexed-up, kissed-by-techno rock, Garbage spends much of their new album, "Bleed Like Me," plugging in their guitars and stomping on distortion pedals. Four years removed from the band's previous release, "Bleed Like Me" is an energetic, 11-track sprint that should thrill fans seeking a fourth platter of Garbage-brand power pop. Ready-made for the arena stage, "Run Baby Run" is an anthem built around a super-sleek, howling refrain: "Life is too short/There's no time to waste it," croons Shirley Manson at the song's bridge. On the disc's title track, Garbage breeds deep, dark strings with cold, hard beats, while Manson - soulful and clear - offers melancholy tales of people in disrepair. On the rampaging "Why Do You Love Me," Manson evokes Blondie-via-Karen O, while the band pounds out a grinding refrain that channels Soundgarden. Maybe it's because "Bleed Like Me" almost never got made, but there are moments when the band is at its best. Desperation yields inspiration.

Nirvana Nevermind

This DVD is a must have for any Nirvana fan and features interviews with the surviving members Chris Novoselic and Dave Grohl, album producer Butch Vig recreating the mixes on the songs, and lots of insight into the recording process of the album. There is also some critical analysis of the songs by a biographer and some journalists.

One of the coolest parts of the DVD is when Butch Vig separates each of the instruments from the songs and describes the recording process. For instance, "In Bloom" has multiple vocal tracks layered upon it. He first played the song with just Kurt's voice, then added Dave Grohl's vocals (high harmonies in the chorus), and finally doubled each of their vocal tracks to produce the finished product.

"Smells Like Teen Spirit" is one of the main segments (totalling around ten minutes long). In the beginning, there is a clip of the first live "Smells Like Teen Spirit" performance. Butch Vig goes into some detail on how he tracked the song. The last part of the segment deals with the making of the music video. As far as the bonus material, there's some background history in the segments "Going to record in LA" and "Dave Grohl joins Nirvana".

Butch Vig goes through about half the album in detail and there are lot of interviews to keep the viewer entertained.

card game

Citadels

Price: R180 | www.boardgames.co.za

CITADELS IS A CARD game that puts two to seven players (eight if using the additional character cards available in this edition of the game) in the role of medieval city builders. The aim of the game is to build a city that will generate the most points at the end of a game.

In the box one finds two types of cards: eighteen character cards (normally only eight are used) and district cards. Every character has a special ability, ranging from the merchant who gets extra gold for trading districts with the dastardly assassin who can assassinate another character. The districts are divided into five major types: military, noble, trade, religious and special. All district cards have an associated cost in gold that has to be paid for the district to be built. In addition, there are counters representing gold, as well as the different characters.

Each turn, players select the character (role) that will be active for the rest of the turn and known only to the player who chose the character. Players take turns based on their characters - as an example, the assassin acts first before anybody. During the rest of a player's turn, a player can either gather gold or draw cards into his hand. Then the player may build a district - i.e. play a card onto the table.



The game itself plays quick, with times of between twenty minutes to an hour depending on the number of players and experience levels. Citadels epitomises the Euro-game (the rule book is only four A5 pages) and has a depth to its gameplay that makes it ideal for gamers who like strategy, deduction and bluffing their opponents.

board game

Money Skills

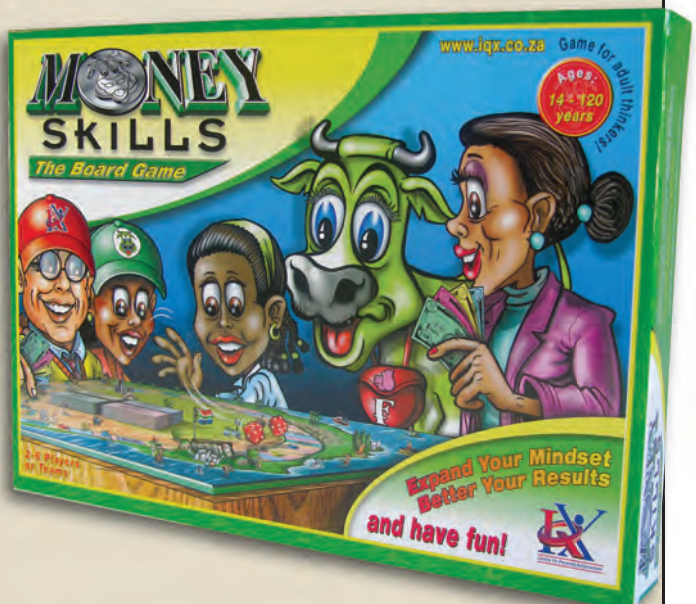
Price: R449 | www.boardgames.co.za

MONEY SKILLS IS A game that targets an interesting niche market, namely the edutainment market. The game is designed to not only be a recreational game, but also an educational tool with regards to teaching players responsible money management.

At first glance it appears to be aimed at a youth market, with the box covered in colourful cartoon graphics. This extends to the game board itself, which portrays a map of South Africa with a very colourful track running inside the edge of the map. The box includes four stacks of cards, six markers, dice, a rule book, black erasable marker pens and six plastic-coated balance sheets.

The aim of the game is to become the first player to build up a certain level of residual income. This is achieved by investing in property, various business opportunities and share investments. The game itself plays in a Monopoly-like fashion, with players advancing around the track based on the roll of two dice. Cards are drawn based on the colour of the track area the player ends up on. The card either gives the player the option of some kind of investment, a penalty or a reward. Players keep track of their income and expenses using one of the balance sheets.

Money Skills takes a while to play - two to four hours - and two to



six players can play the game. Looking at it on its merits as a game only, Money Skills relies heavily on luck - sometimes it feels too much depended on a random roll. Furthermore, there is very little interaction between players. However, Money Skills is not only a game, but also an educational tool and that differentiates this game from others by teaching teenagers and adults alike financial skills.

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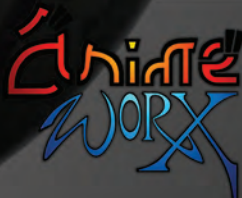
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PlayStation 2



GAME OVER

Badger Hunt

Due to popular demand we've resurrected the badger hunt competition. Each month we choose a cunning hiding place in the magazine for our badger friend [this might be in a screenshot, on a piece of artwork, the cover or anywhere really]. Your job is to find him and let us know you have!

We'll announce a random winner each month, but we don't have a sponsor for this competition yet. So all you'll get for your effort is a pat on the back and your name up in lights. Send your badger spotting to this address [ed@nag.co.za] with the subject line [July Badger].

Rules: (1) The winner is picked randomly. (2) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (3) Any company wanting to sponsor a monthly prize for this can get hold of the Editor at the same e-mail address. Only cool prizes will be considered – no clothing or vouchers. We personally think case modification goodies would be ideal, but that's just us.



This is what he looks like, happy hunting.

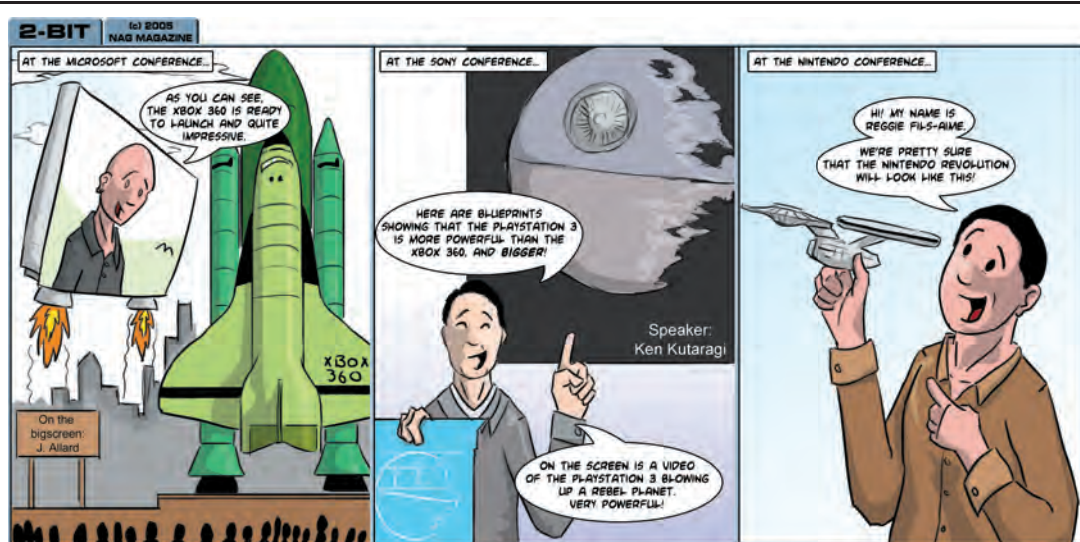
CAPTION OF THE MONTH

EVERY MONTH WE'LL CHOOSE a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it [unless we can think of something clever ourselves]. Your job is to come up with a better [funny] caption and send it to us. The winner of this competition will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to this address [ed@nag.co.za] with the subject line [July Caption].



NAG: Mosquitoes Jim... I'm telling you, as big as cars.

Rules: (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. (3) You must remember to help smaller kids have fun too. (4) No shoes or boots in the play area. (5) Everyone has fun if you share. (6) No climbing on the outside of the structure. (7) No pushing on the slide. (8) Keep your mouth shut and cellular phone off in the cinema. (9) Buying pirate games empowers criminals. (10) No fishing.



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Avant-grade slanting air vents like a sports car



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W511A

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- Intel Centrino Mobile Technology (with Intel Pentium M Processor 735 1.7GHz 400MHz FSB, 2MB L2 cache)
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- ATI Radeon X700 (M28) PCI-E Graphics
- 512MB DDR RAM
- 15.4" (15:9) WXGA TFT LCD
- 60GB HDD
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